The Aquinas Lecture, 2005

Common-Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition

Nicholas Rescher

Marquette University Press
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

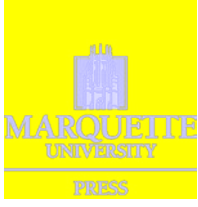
Common-Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition

This page intentionally left blank

The Aquinas Lecture, 2005

Common-Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition

Nicholas Rescher



Under the auspices of the
Wisconsin-Alpha Chapter of Phi Sigma Tau

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rescher, Nicholas.
Common-sense : a new look at an old philosophical tradition / Nicholas Rescher.
p. cm. — (The Aquinas lecture ; 2005)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-87462-172-0 (alk. paper)
1. Common sense. I. Title. II. Series.
B105.C457R47 2005
149—dc22

2005000252

All rights reserved.

© 2005 Marquette University Press
Printed in the United States of America

Association of American University Presses

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY PRESS
MILWAUKEE

The Association of Jesuit University Presses

Prefatory

The Wisconsin-Alpha Chapter of Phi Sigma Tau, the International Honor Society for Philosophy at Marquette University, each year invites a scholar to deliver a lecture in honor of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The 2005 Aquinas Lecture, *Common Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition*, was delivered on Sunday, February 13, 2005, by Nicholas Rescher, University Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, where he also serves as Co-Chair of the Center for the Philosophy of Science.

Professor Rescher has served as a President of the American Philosophical Association, of the American G. W. Leibniz Society, and of the C. S. Peirce Society. He has recently completed his term as president of the American Catholic Philosophy Association and is president-elect of the American Metaphysical Society. An honorary member of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, he has been elected to membership in the European Academy of Arts and Sciences (Academia Europaea), the Institut International de Philosophie, and several other learned academies. He has held visiting lectureships at Oxford, Constance, Salamanca, Munich, and Marburg, and he has been awarded

fellowships by the Ford, Guggenheim, and National Science Foundations. He is the author of some hundred books ranging over many areas of philosophy, over a dozen of them translated into other languages. He is the recipient of six honorary degrees from universities on three continents and was awarded the Alexander von Humboldt Prize for Humanistic Scholarship in 1984.

Professor Rescher's many books deal with wide-ranging areas of philosophy, such as the theory of knowledge, metaphysics, pragmatism, philosophy of science and technology, ethics and value theory, social philosophy, philosophical logic, and metaphilosophy. In the history of philosophy he has written books on Leibniz and Kant as well as other figures in medieval and modern philosophy. He also has nine books on Arabic and Greco-Arabic philosophy. His several hundred articles in learned journals reveal a similar breadth of interest and expertise. Besides these books and articles already in print there are another eight books in press as well as several more articles.

To Professor Rescher's distinguished list of publications, Phi Sigma Tau is pleased to add: *Common Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition.*

.

Table of Contents

Preface 9
I. Common-Sense Knowledge and Its Nature 11
II. The Rationale of Common-Sense Knowledge ... 51
III. Certainty and Scepticism in the Light of Common Sense 71
IV. Common Sense, Trust, and Communication ... 89
V. Science and Common Sense 129
VI. Universality and Common Sense in Moral Matters 167
VII. Common Sense in Philosophy 203
Conclusion 235
Notes 237
Bibliography 249
Index 260

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

Unlike the most famous work of this title—Tom Paine's *Common Sense*—the present book is not a political tract but a philosophical monograph. Philosophy has long had a love-hate relationship with common sense. On the one side, philosophers want to stay on good terms with common sense and avert the charge of falling into absurdities and paradoxes. On the other side, philosophers are uneasy about giving much heed to what is so trite and truistic as to be unable to afford material of insight and interest. The aim of the present discussion is to survey this ground and to consider the place and promise of common sense from a philosophical point of view. Its key message is that common sense deserves a good deal more respect than philosophers have of late been prepared to give it.

The book was drafted in Pittsburgh during the academic years 2001-2003 and polished in Oxford during the summer of 2003. I am grateful to Estelle Burris for help in its preparation.

Nicholas Rescher
Pittsburgh PA
October 20, 2004

This page intentionally left blank

I

Common-Sense Knowledge and Its Nature

1. Common Sense

Common sense is generally viewed as dealing with the commonplaces of the everyday-life experience of ordinary people in the ordinary course of things. It is a realm populated by "the usual suspects" of ordinary, everyday life: of things animal, vegetable, and mineral, of dogs, trees, and rocks. It is the subject of innumerable facts: dogs (sometimes) bark, rainwater dries up on streets, some foods taste better than others. It is effectively inconceivable to us that we could ever change our mind about such things. Someone who seriously denied this would be deemed crazy. The facts of common sense are not particularly interesting, but we could not live and thrive in the world without accepting and acting on commonplaces of this kind.

The ancient Stoics called such matters *ennoai koinai* (common realizations), beliefs held by all without need for demonstration or supportive argumentation.[1] And so, common sense, so René Descartes told us, "is the most fairly distributed thing in all the world, since everyone thinks himself to be so well supplied with it, that even those

who are hardest to satisfy in every other respect generally do not desire more of it than they already have."[2] All the same, philosophers have over the centuries understood rather different things to be at issue here.[3] In particular, three distinct but interrelated matters have been treated under the rubric of common sense, namely:

- *observational* common sense (the classical *sensus communis*) as a matter of the collection and coordination of the deliverances of our external senses with special reference to those features of things that are accessible to more than one of our senses. (As, for example, the shape or size of objects discernible by both sight and touch, while their color is discernible by sight alone.)
- *judgmental* common sense as "good judgment" (*phronesis*) regarding matters that are obvious and evident to anyone of sound understanding (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) on the basis of everyday experience, without elaborate reasoning, calculation, or investigation. (This encompasses in particular the work-a-day prudential recognitions of ordinary life: That drinking alleviates thirst, for example, or eating hunger, or again that fire is hot.)
- *consensual* common sense (*Gemeinsinn*) as a matter of facts that "everyone knows" and with respect to which there is a universal (or near-universal) agreement of people's opinion. (For example that rocks cannot talk nor pigs fly.)

These issues are interrelated thanks (among other things) to the following considerations:

- Given that agreement among independent witnesses is evidentially confirmative, a claim to truth is substantiated as plausible when diverse senses agree on the matter. Thus shape judgments are securer than color judgments (people are far more readily color blind than shape blind.) In consequence, the claims of observational common sense are thereby rendered judgmentally secure.
- For the same reason (viz., that agreement among independent observers is strongly confirmative) consensually agreed beliefs will thereby emerge as judgmentally secure.
- Where matters are judgmentally "obvious to any reasonable person" in the course of ordinary, everyday experience, there is most likely going to be a consensus about them. And the same, of course, holds for things that are evident to sense.

Thus while the different modes of common sense are theoretically distinguishable, it must be expected that they will exhibit a good deal of overlap when applied in actual practice.

The conception of common sense also bears some kinship to the conception of a *consensus gentium*, a culture-transcending commonality of thought, that figured in the writings of seventeenth century legal and political theorists. Looking to fundamental principles reflecting a uniformity of thought across cultural divides, they stressed the

significance of fundamental uniformities reflecting the human condition at large. This line of thought comes close to the definitive concerns of common sense as well.

And so, the historical mainstream of Scottish common-sensism correspondingly took common sense to be a matter of faculty psychology. The Scottish common-sense philosophers often said that belief in the truths of common sense is imposed upon us by "the constitution of our nature" (thus using a phrase also favored by Kant). As they saw it, some sort of bio-psychological compulsion impels us to the acceptance in sensory and judgmental matters. Thus according to Lord Kames (1696-1782), a founder of the school, there are principles implanted in our nature that permit us to draw certain conclusions that reason alone does not establish, and it is such tendencies of our nature that we need to rely upon as a basic source of truth.[4]

As the Scottish philosophers saw it, common sense was seen as a particular mental capacity (a "power of the mind") that so functions as to certify various judgments as characteristically obvious (or "self-evident"). It was regarded as a faculty of judgment, or rather as the most elemental and rudimentary component of such a faculty, dealing with the simplest of matters where the possibility

of error is effectively nil. Thus Beattie defined common sense as:

> That power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by instantaneous, instinctive, and irresistible impulse.[5]

For thinkers of this school, what is at issue was thus a peculiar faculty—a certain "power of the mind"—so that common sense reflects a commonality of judgmental operation inherent in the fact that we humans are bio-psychologically constructed as we are.

In this regard the thinkers of the Scottish school looked back to the philosophical psychology of the medievals. Thus, for example, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64) had taught in his *De docta ignorantia* that apart from reason (dealing with inference) and the senses (dealing with physical perception) there is also a faculty of intellectual perception that affords through cognitive intuition (*intuitio intellectualis*) an insight into basic truths, such as those relating to the *modus operandi* of our cognitive faculties themselves. Common sense was characterized in terms of process as a faculty for providing certain sorts of information with a failproof reliability that compels people's acceptance.

However, while ancient and medieval thinkers generally construed common sense (sensus communis) in the perceptual mode of observational common sense and thus in connection with their treatment of faculty psychology, they also addressed the conception of common knowledge that is (or should be) universal among reasonable people in general. Along with most everything else this view of things came to them from Aristotle—specifically in this case via his conception of endoxa as treated in the Topics, which represents beliefs that are effectively universal among reasonable people.

Thomas Reid (1710-96), the principal figure of the Scottish school,[6] was still linked firmly to the faculty psychology of the old philosophical regime, regarding common-sense beliefs—or at any rate the most basic among them—as truths that our very constitution leads as to accept, seeing that they "came to the mind from nature . . . [bearing] her image and superscription."[7]

Reid's teachings and doctrines were extended and developed by a series of successors that extended the influence of the school for over one and a half centuries, in particular by James Beattie (1735-1803), Dugald Steward (1753-1828), Thomas Brown (1778-1820), and James McCosh (1811-1894).[8] As Reid and his school saw it, the human mind has an inherent tendency to form certain "original and natural judgments" as an

innate "part of its constitution" and thus provides for a "common sense of mankind" that furnishes the basic underpinning for our beliefs and our reasonings.

Eventually, however, in an era and culture that has long-ago abandoned faculty psychology, it was deemed proper to construe common sense as consisting in and comprising that manifold of rudimentary judgments themselves. There came a shift from process to product, with common sense defined simply through the fact of its effectively universal claims upon us as something that any halfway intelligent individual can and should know. And in present-day usage it is the universally compelling cogency of common-sense belief that is generally at issue. After all, there is ultimately no decisive reason why the basis of those common-sensical convictions of ours should not lie in their own epistemic appeal rather than the psychological endorsement of some psychologically inherent facility.

Consider, for example, the following passage from Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, where Goethe maintains:

> Nothing is more dangerous to the well-being of a theater than the director's being so placed that a greater or lesser receipt at the box office does not affect him person-

> ally. . . . *It is a property of human nature soon to relax when not impelled by personal advantage or disadvantage.*[9]

The proposition that is italicized here—to the effect that people deem matters of self-interest as important to themselves—is a truism attested by everyday experience. Such a contention accordingly typifies the lessons of common sense. They are uncontroversial truth, banal truisms, obvious facts of life—a part of what people at large, and, in particular, ordinary people in ordinary circumstances—do and should accept as effectively self-evident and obvious, requiring no further evidentiation or substantiation.

In present-day philosophical deliberations "common-sense beliefs" has come to be seen as a matter of sound judgment (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) not through psychological imprinting or social conditioning but rather through being truistic in dealing with matters so evident that people with normal cognitive faculties could not fail to realize their truth.[10] Common sense, so regarded, is a matter of cognitive minimalism, encompassing "What any halfway intelligent person is bound to realize." Accordingly, common-sense beliefs are generally matters of experiential fact as ordinary people in ordinary circumstances are bound to encounter them.

And on this basis the judgmental mode of common sense came into the foreground. Common sense so construed becomes a matter of beliefs that are not only generally accessible but "perfectly obvious" as well. And so, as the matter is generally viewed nowadays, common sense is a matter of what people will accept without argumentation or evidentiation as truistically "self-evident." (It is this that prevents religious beliefs, however widespread, from qualifying as commonsensical in the presently operative sense of the term.) Such common-sense judgments need not be arrived at in any particular way via a peculiar faculty of common sense. What is at issue, rather, is something substantially negative—viz., that they are *not* arrived at through study, complex evidentiation, extensive analysis, or deep rationalism. When some contention "is mere common sense" we sensibly expect people to have it at their disposal without any further ado—either on their part or on ours. And it is this sort of *judgmental* common sense, as explained above, that will lie at the center of the present deliberations.

2. A Reidean Retrospective

Thomas Reid held that we have no alternative but to take the claims of experience-based common sense at face value and to accept them as true.

He saw common-sense matters as immediately evident; everything else we know needs rational substantiation while immediate experience is home free:

> Can any man prove that his consciousness may not deceive him? No man can: nor can we give a better reason for trusting to it than that every man, while his mind is sound, is determined by the constitution of his nature, to give implicit belief on it, and to laugh at, or pity, the man who doubts its testimony.[11]

Reid accordingly proposed the following instances for which he regarded as "first principles or contingent truths"[12]:

- That anything and everything of which one is [distinctly] conscious exists.[13]
- That anything and everything that one distinctly remembers did really happen.
- That anything and everything one distinctly perceives by the senses really exists as one perceives it to be.

To be sure, in applying or implementing one of these principles we generally will arrive—and doubtless always regard ourselves as arriving—at a common-sense truth. But the propositions themselves merely state what is a procedural principle and not a factual truth—let alone a truth of common sense. Such principles may well describe

the *modus operandi* of common sense, but they do not themselves affirm common-sense facts: they relate to processes not products. (Viewed propositionally rather than procedurally and then taken literally and strictly, they are unquestionably false.)

All the same, as the preceding Reidean examples show, common-sense beliefs are a matter of general principles. But the particular beliefs at issue for the application or implementation of such principles are also themselves generally characterized as commonsensical, although a linguistic philosopher just might want to distinguish between "common-sense beliefs" as such at the level of generality, and the more specific "matters of common sense" that issue for their application or instantiation.

The Scottish philosophers and such successors as G. E. Moore saw the common sense's endorsement as a guarantee of certainty. This is going too far. For, such thinkers to the contrary notwithstanding, the perduring tradition of scepticism with its illusions and delusions and the long litany of human folly have to be given due weight. Even the data of immediate experience have to meet a test—the test of rational systematization. But the crucial fact remains that this is a test that the bulk of them—the great majority—are destined to pass. After all, the rudimentary truths represented by conceptual relationships whose denial would result

in patent absurdities must also count in this regard. Thus it is "only a matter of common sense:"

- That no one is older than himself
- That no mouse is an elephant
- That no number is flexible
- That every animal has a body

In common-sense matters we operate on the presumption that our interlocutors are aware of the elementary facts regarding the meaning of simple words in the language (street, tree, dog). But of course such conceptual necessities do not exhaust the range of common sense. Some typical examples of commonsensical knowledge that go beyond this verbal/conceptual range are:

- Elementary facts about arithmetic (2 + 1 = 3, 2 + 2 + 4, 3 x 2 = 6, triangles have three sides).
- Elementary facts about the *modus-operandi* of familiar things (birds can generally fly, knives can generally cut, bread needs baking and is edible, water satisfies thirst, fire burns).

Note that these are all rudimentary truths in various basic areas of knowledge and as such are a matter of common sense.

By contrast, the following are some typical examples of practical common sense:

- People resent insults (so don't insult the boss).
- Children like presents (so bring something home to the kids when you go on a trip).
- Falling from great height can be hurtful—or worse (so take care in climbing trees or walking along cliffs, ledges, etc.).
- Dogs can be fiercely territorial (so be mindful of that "Beware of the dog" sign).

Note that these are all matters of prudence—of taking due precautions against harms or due care in facilitating benefits in the management of our practical affairs.

3. Common Sense vs. "Common Knowledge"

Commonsensical knowledge is something quite different from common knowledge. For common knowledge is something consensual and relates to pervasive knowledge or general belief—to "what *everyone* does know." Common-sense knowledge, on the other hand, is a matter of "what everyone *should* know," that is, it encompasses those items of information regarding which we would be prepared to say that everyone "must" or "shall" know them given the basic realities of the human situation. Common knowledge is a purely factual matter, whereas commonsensical knowledge has a decidedly normative aspect. With common-sense knowledge there is a background rationale of gen-

eral principle: why anyone and everyone should be deemed to be cognizant of what is at issue.

Common-sense information is the sort of knowledge that is at the disposal of everyone—not to the trained and knowledgeable alone, but even to "the meanest intellect." And for this very reason its proper range must be limited to the sorts of plain and unadorned facts that are readily apprehensible to anyone and everyone—facts, such as "There are dogs in the world" for example. All those sorts of fact that are to any degree complex and technical in nature are inaccessible to common sense—being matters of expertise they require to some extent the sorts of special knowledge available only to certain special people. Thus, even if reasoning is involved so that intuition is not at issue, the matter can still be one of common sense provided that the reasoning is sufficiently obvious that its availability is effectively universal. There is thus nothing sophisticated, complicated, or technical about common-sense knowledge, and no special training or insight is needed for its realization. It relates to the sort of thing that anyone must realize who functions in the circumstances at issue.

Accordingly, common-sense truths need not and will not be facts that everyone actually and overtly accepts. Rather, common-sense truths (as here understood) are those facts—or types of fact—that people at large, circumstanced as they

are, *should* accept on the basis of general experience and that therefore the vast bulk of ordinary (normal and adult) people *would*—unhesitatingly and unreflectively accept if the matter were ever raised with them.

Preeminently, common sense encompasses the claims characterizing the circumstances that provide a natural and cogent rationale for meeting our human needs. That fire is hot, that being burned hurts, that pain is unpleasant—these are the sorts of unexciting commonsensical facts that one expects anyone to have learned at mother's knee. And this itself—that there are many such facts—is itself a common-sense fact. If someone were to deny such a contention we would have little alternative to thinking that this individual simply does not grasp what is being said. With respect to *such* truths we incline to endorse Spinoza's proposition: "Someone who has a true idea thereby realizes this fact, and cannot doubt the truth of the matter."[14]

Some writers see common sense as no more than "folk opinions" of "folk theory"—the all too vulnerable beliefs of uninitiated (and indeed often uncivilized) people. It is, so they seem to think, no more than a crude insistence of opinions compounded of crude ideas and unthinking opinion and superstitious belief.[15] But this is not and never

has been what common-sense philosophers have meant by the term.

4. Differing from Common Sense

There are two contrastive oppositions to common sense, depending on whether what is at issue involves too little or too much intelligence—too much or too little mental sophistication. On the former side common sense contrasts with foolishness or idiocy; on the latter side it contrasts with expertise. For any domain whose assertions need to be substantiated by deploying a complex and potentially controversial body of inquiry or learning is automatically disqualified from common sense.

Common-sense beliefs are virtually always trivial in substance. The fact of their universal accessibility and pervasive acceptance means that the issue is not going to be something subtle or complex. A common-sense belief would not—could not—be of this status were it not at the disposal of someone of distinctly modest intelligence. It thus has to be something that pretty well anyone can reasonably be expected to know. To have such things be explicitly propounded or explained to oneself is effectively an insult.

What are we to make of those who dissent from common-sense truths? When someone offers a

judgment that seems at odds with common sense we would—for that very reason—certainly look for—and expect to find—an explanation. In the first instance we would of course incline to think that we misunderstood the person. But what if the same person were to persist despite all due efforts at explanation and clarification? We would then think that they are simply paradoxers with some peculiar motive for persisting in patiently. But should this avenue of escape be closed off we would have little recourse but to resort to the language of psychopathology. Such people are singularly stupid—or worse.

G. W. Leibniz observed: "Someone is said to offend against common sense who could be an utter idiot (*stultus*) to do this sort of thing often."[16] Thomas Reid wrote that if someone "suffers himself to be reasoned out of the principles of common sense by metaphysical argument, we may call this metaphysical lunacy."[17] On such a basis, when someone dissents from common sense, that person's claims can be seen as individual aberrations that need not be taken seriously. The denial of a common-sense truth is not a matter of logical incoherence but of cognitive incompetence. The chess player who moves his piece improperly is not caught up in a logical contradiction but in an anomaly of practice—he is engaged in a project defined by certain rules of procedure which, owing

to some perversity or defect of competence, he fails to follow.

The rejection of common-sense truths is an inappropriate course because it is bound to lead to misfortune. However, the misfortune involved can range in seriousness from minor proportions along the lines of conflicts with fundamental aspects of our view of how things work in the world ("Other things equal, heavier objects are more difficult to lift than lighter ones") to outright catastrophe and disaster of the sort involved in outright logico-conceptual incoherence (as would be the case with rejecting "Triangles have angles"). Throughout, however, a denial of common-sense truths is bound to conflict with deep-rooted features of our view of how things work in the world—with fundamental aspects of our understanding of the world's ways (our "Weltanschauung"). It is not just a matter of being incompatible with something we happen to regard as true, but involves a more far-reaching destabilization of our basic view of how things work in nature and human affairs.

To ignore common sense is to be unaware of facts ordinary people are generally supposed to know. Not realizing (say) that fire is hot effectively gears one to proceeding on the basis that it isn't—and doing this (i.e., proceeding on the basis that "fire doesn't burn") is to go against common sense. To all intents and purposes, simply ignoring common

sense is every bit as inappropriate and wrong-headed as actually contradicting it. We encounter utter foolishness either way. Within the region where common sense operates at all an opinion could not possibly raise the red flag of doubtfulness more vividly than by standing in violation of the claims of common sense.

5. Common-Sense Knowledge as Transparent and Self-Evident

Common-sense beliefs are certain. And here it is not just that you or I or *X* is certain of such a belief but rather that—impersonally—what is believed is a certainty. But of course the certainty at issue is not that hyperbolic absolute certainty whose unavailability has been argued by philosophical sceptics since classical antiquity. No; common-sense certainty is the certainty of life—the certainty of the legal standard of "being" beyond reasonable doubt." The only sort of doubt that common sense permits is a doubt for which the ordinary course of human experience leaves no room in the minds of reasonable people.

The facts of common sense have two definitive features: they appear to be *transparently true* through the circumstance that they are obvious and (in a certain way) *self-evident*. Their transparent truth lies in the consideration that they are

"obvious" and patently acceptable, as is evidenced by the fact that their denial would be deemed not just false but absurd and wildly eccentric. (How could you sensibly deny "Pain is something negative" or "There are rocks in the world?") And common- sense truths are self-evident or perhaps better self-evidentiating in the sense of resisting other-evidentiation.

To say that a proposition is immediately "self-evident" in the way that is at issue with common sense is of course not to gainsay that it can *admit* of evidentiation. It is, rather, to deny that it *requires* evidentiation in that whatever evidence would be adduced to substantiate it would be even more questionable and problematic than that proposition itself, and would thus be unable to endow it with productive support. To seek to evidentiate such a proposition would be to engage in the pointless venture of endeavoring to support a contention by something that is itself even more seriously in need of support.

But while common sense is solidly secure and powerfully resistant to denial or dismissal, it is, at the same time distinctly unexciting: trite, obvious, and firmly at the disposal of even an unsophisticated intellect. Where issues can be settled on the basis of common sense it is only reasonable to resolve them thus. But (perhaps unfortunately) the range of issues that can be resolved on this basis is

very limited indeed. The Achilles' heel of common sense is not its rightness but its limited range.

The evidence of common-sense beliefs lies in their manifest obviousness. The question "How is one to decide the acceptability of a common-sense belief?" is simple: one doesn't. There is no process of decision about it. Those common-sense beliefs are self-evident in the sense of wearing their acceptability on their sleeves: they are acceptable not in virtue of the processes of certain features they have but simply in virtue of what they themselves are as essentially self-evident propositions.

And here "being evident" is meant in a special sort of way. And this is so because common sense is a matter of those considerations whose probative claims upon our acceptance are effectively maximal; that is, they are as strong as any such claims could realistically be. And there is no point in trying to adduce further evidence for their substantiation because their supposedly substantiating contention would not possibly be more secure than the claims on whose behalf they are being adduced. A common-sense claim is—as G. E. Moore put it—as certain itself as anything that could possibly be said for it. It needs no grounding in substantiating considerations because it is itself in better probative condition than anything that could be adduced on its behalf.

One recent writer complains that "The unsatisfied demand for demonstration casts a shadow of doubt over the truths of common sense."[18] But as Reid (and indeed already Aristotle) insisted, since demonstration proceeds from given premises we are simply not in a position to demonstrate *everything*—"all the way down" so to speak. But the fact that not everything is ever demonstrated (or evidentiated) does not mean that there is anything indemonstrable. The crux of common sense is not that it bears upon facts that *admit* of no evidentiation but rather upon those that *require* none. They are themselves every bit as tenable as anything that could plausibly be adduced on their behalf. The medievals characterized such propositions as (self-) *evident*, and thereby distinct from truths apprehended by sensory experiences and by facts drawn by inference from other "prior" facts.[19]

A common-sense belief is not a belief that is *produced* in a certain way but rather a particular sort of belief, viz., one that is available to people-in-general on account of its triteness, its palpable obviousness. It is a nondiscursive and nonreflective belief of which one is as certain—and as *reasonably* certain—as one can be of anything in the sense that it would be otiose to set out to find *reasons* for such a belief because the belief itself is just as—or even more—cogent and assured than would be the case with anything one might adduce on its behalf.

And so when, with G. W. Moore, it is maintained that "This is a human hand that I am holding up before me," it is somewhere between difficult and impossible to think of any substantial claim that is in better evidential shape.

What facts are accessible to common sense? Broadly speaking the answer is: those that fall into the range of people's everyday experience. And "experience" should here be understood broadly as going well beyond the range of mere observation—of sensory and effective experience. I do not *observe* that Smith believes it will rain. But nevertheless when I see that he is wearing his raincoat and carrying this umbrella, "it is only common sense" that I should accept that Smith believes it will rain, seeing that "People who wear rain gear and carry umbrellas regard rain as imminent" qualifies as a matter of common sense.

Universality is not the crux of common sense as such. Rather, the pervasiveness at issue is a consequence of the obviousness that the definition of commonsensicalness requires. In sum, universality of acceptance is at once a *consequence of* and an *indicator of* the presence of that obviousness that demonstrates common-sense beliefs as such.

The fact that common-sense beliefs are obvious and evident means that they do not require further substantiation because no substantiating consideration could be markedly more evident

and unquestionable than that belief itself. And any imaginable counter-evidentiation to a common-sense belief would (if only for that reason) manifest itself as absurd. The point is that, as far as normally intelligent people are concerned, common-sense beliefs neither need nor admit of *meaningful* evidential substantiation. It is not that there are no reasons for accepting them but rather that they do not require this.

Thus understood, common sense is something of a rhetorical concept, seeing that it encompasses those facts which the interlocutors who might be concerned in the discussion already realize full well. Claims of this sort require no further substantiation: they are "home free," exempt from any need for *further* substantiation, seeing that they relate to what everyone concerned can and should be presumed to know perfectly well.

Some writers insist that common-sense beliefs are beliefs which, though justified, are *noninferentially* justified.[20] But that seems odd. Why should my belief that *you* are mortal be prevented from being a common-sense belief simply by being inferable and indeed inferred from my common-sense belief that *all* human beings are mortal? The crux is not that a common-sense belief *cannot* be inferentially justified but rather that it *need not* be so because they themselves already are *evident*. The "evidence" of common-sense judgments is

attested—that is, criteriologically manifested—in the effectively universal endorsement of their acceptability and their inassailability (in that their denial would be seen not just as false but as absurd or paradoxical).

Thomas Reid maintained that common-sense beliefs have certain definitive characteristics:

- *universality* by way of being generally held.
- *commonality* in reflecting the usage of all languages.
- *undeniability* by way of being such that their contradictions are not merely false but absurd.
- *irresistibility* so that even those who question them at the level of theory are compelled to accept them in conducting the practical affairs of life.

But even with all this accepted, the question remains: "Are those beliefs commonsensical *because* they exhibit these features, or do they exhibit these features *because* they are commonsensical?" And the sensible course here is to deny the former and assert the latter. If those beliefs were "commonsensical" on the ground of the possession of such complex features, then they would surely qualify as commonsensical to all. No—on the contrary—they have these features (insofar as they do so) exactly thanks to their being common-sense beliefs in the judgmental mode we have been concerned to specify.

6. Common Sense Is Principled

One recent writer says that: "Lots of such [common-sense] beliefs aren't common at all; they're entirely personal. . . . [For example] that my left leg is now bent at the knee—no one else believes that."[21] But of course *every* normal person is able to realize the commonsensical fact that one's leg is bent when one is seated at a writing desk—there is nothing personal about that. That supposedly personalized bit of common sense is simply an *instance* of a universally accessible common-sense fact. Common-sense facts always are—and must be—grounded in generally accepted principles.

Common-sense principles are general rules that govern the determination of common-sense truths. Accordingly both principles and specifics can be matters of common sense—but the latter only under the aegis of the former. The principle of trusting the evidence of one's own eyes is a matter of common sense, so that when G. E. Moore holds up his hand, looks at it, points to it and says "I know this is a human hand," he is still in the region of common-sense knowledge.

Rationality carries common sense in its wake. After all, reason aspires to universality: what is a good reason for *X* to believe or do is—other things being equal—always alone a good reason for *Y*. And in this way too, common sense is common.

And common sense—or good sense, as it can also be called—behaves in much the same way, which is exactly what renders it common in the relevant sense, not of cheap or easy, but as available to all willing and able to avail themselves of it.

But do not people in different times and places accept common-sense truths different from ours? Did they not once upon a time think that the earth is flat, that the moon is made of green cheese, that storms at sea are manifestations of Neptune's wrath? Perhaps they did! And what of witchcraft and the evil eye?

It is crucial in this context to distinguish between *common* or *popular* beliefs in general and *common-sense* beliefs in specific. Common sense is something much more elemental and crude than what is at issue in those examples. The structure of the-earth-as-a-whole, the material composition of the moon, and the causative basis of sea-storms all represent issues that transcend the resources of common sense as we here understand it. None of these are matters which figure patently in the common experiences of great masses of peoples. While they can indeed be common opinion, they are not issues of common sense as this conception is at issue here.

It is certainly not the case that every widely or even generally held belief is a matter of common sense. Many people believe in astrology and many,

perhaps even most, people believe in certain superstitions (that misfortunes follow breaking a mirror or that crucial good luck can be manipulated by carrying a rabbit's foot). Such things are the very opposite of common sense because what is required for common sense is *grounding in a general principle that reflects* the general experience of mankind in meeting human needs. And belief in the existence of witches—be it right or wrong—is not a matter of common sense because it does not fill the bill of what is required here. By contrast it is only a matter of common sense "to let sleeping dogs lie" because the irritability of the just awakened—be they dogs or people—is a phenomenon of which most or all of us have had some experience. It is something available to all or most of us on the basis of our own experience. And it is thus its *grounding in the general run of everyday experience* rather than a generality of endorsement that makes a generalization into "only a matter of common sense."

There is thus a big difference between merely *common* beliefs that are very widespread and perhaps even general and specifically *commonsensical* beliefs. This difference lies in the fact that commonsensical beliefs are determined as such not simply by the fact *that* they are widespread but rather by the explanatory rationale of *why* this is so, namely, because such beliefs are what they are

on account of their role in a cognitive agent's *modus operandi* in satisfying human needs—in enabling us to function effectively as the sorts of creatures we are. It is this essentially pragmatic grounding that through facilitating the satisfaction of human needs serves to define commonsensical beliefs as such. For the common-sense principles of belief formation are those that are pervasive because they are generally conducive to realizing the needs of a creature whose actions in the world are grounded in its beliefs and whose ongoing presence in the world—individually and collectively—requires it to act efficiently in cooperating with others to meet those needs (for such necessities as food, shelter, clothing, sociability, etc.).

But in the end, then, common-sense facts are not really a matter of biology (of hard-wired connections imprinted by biological evolution) or a matter of sociology (of the statistically shared connections of the social group). Rather, they are a matter of epistemology: of considerations so fundamental and evident that their acceptability-warrant is every bit as strong as anything that could possibly be adduced on their behalf. They themselves in effect are maximally plausible beliefs—beliefs of a credibility as great as that of anything we could manage to adduce on their behalf. With such judgments we would not, in general, dream of asking for substantiating evi-

dence. Acceptance of such a proposition is seen as only normal, natural, and to be expected. For common sense is a matter of what any sensible person will (or should!) accept.

But of course not only propositions but also the cognitive principles through which they can be established deserve the name of common sense. Consider for example the principle: "A highly plausible contention that is evidentially uncontradicted merits acceptance as true until such time (if ever) when counterevidence actually comes to view." Such commonsensical principles of procedural practice will issue in results that can also be characterized as commonsensical. After all, a specific belief qualifies as commonsensical by virtue of its grounding in a common-sense principle, and its universal accessibility is a *consequence* of this grounding and not a *cause* of it.

In fact, all of our particular and specific commonsensical beliefs will—and must!—be grounded in (and thereby constitute exemplification of) common-sense principles. It is only a matter of common sense to make sure of its routing before boarding a bus or train. But this is the case only because doing so instantiates the general principle "Make sure that the means you employ for the accomplishment of an objective are potentially efficacious for its pursuit." In this sort of way all appropriate common-sense beliefs must be

subsumable under and constitute instances of appropriate principles of common sense. And such principles must themselves be matters of common sense, seeing that they cannot convey to other items a feature which they themselves are lacking. Common sense, in sum, is always a matter of principles.

On this basis, the conception of common sense functions basically in the three following ways:

- *Common-sense principles*: These are in effect general rules of procedure specifying modes of action designed to meet universal human needs (for food, health, safety, information, etc.). For example: do no take pointless and needless risks.
- *Common-sense generalizations*: There are contentions that apply common-sense principles to particular types of cases. For example: It is foolish and dangerous to cross the road without checking the prevailing traffic.
- *Matters of common sense*: There are statements that concretize and illustrate common-sense propositions in particular instances. For example: It was ill-advised and foolish of Smith to cross the road this morning without checking the prevailing traffic.

Such a series of increasingly specific instantiations of general principles of procedure forms what may be termed an *implementation hierarchy*, something to which we shall return in chapter 7 below. For present purposes the salient fact is simply that

common sense constitutes a purposive venture, a mode of endeavor with a characteristic aim of its own, namely, to achieve a rationally grounded commonality (uniformity) of opinion and evaluation in a commonalty of agents dependent on cooperative and collaborative action in meeting human needs. And the hierarchy at issue is grounded in the interests of an effective pursuit of such a valid objective. The rationale of common sense lies precisely on this teleological and pragmatic aspect of our recourse to its teachings, so that a common-sense belief is one whose pervasiveness among people in general is engendered through the fact that the information it provides is highly useful for managing our affairs so as to meet human needs effectively and efficiently.

Thus what we have here is a fundamentally pragmatic construal of the conception of common-sense beliefs. And so no matter how widespread belief in the existence of supernatural being(s) or of witches may be—no matter how general and pervasive—this circumstance does not establish such beliefs as matters of common sense. For such beliefs are the products of cultural conditioning rather than rooting in certain fundamental principles inherent in the processes that delineate the effective *modus operandi* of intelligent agents.

7. Common Sense in an Era of Exploding Information

A major library like the Library of Congress or the British Library has over 30 x 10^6 printed works, divided more or less evenly between books and lesser items. A hypothetical individual who is an avid reader, reading three items per week on average from ages 5 to 80 will read roughly 1.2 x 10^4 items in a lifetime and will thus be able to read roughly 1/25th of one percent of what there is—hardly a representative sample. And this is not yet the worst of it. For those collections are growing at a rate of one 10^6 items per annum, and at the indicated rate our avid reader will be able to keep up with only some 1% of new production. Not a good prospect for keeping up.

Such figures make for trends that have significant repletion for the scene that confronts us in this era, specifically including:

- an ever-finer division of labor in intellectual work.
- An ever narrowing perspective of individuals working in virtually every sector of inquiry.
- an ever more extensive amateurism of understanding among people who are such experts in a given technical domain.

Clearly the day when people could keep up with the general state of the affairs in the Republic of Learning are long over.

And this condition of things prevails in philosophy as well, as is apparent even on superficial scrutiny. For we find that someone working in this field is no longer just a philosopher, but a philosopher of something—of art, say, or of law. And indeed matters have gone well beyond this into narrower and more specialized branches. Where once there was the philosopher of science, there was subsequently the philosopher of physics, and then of quantum physics, and finally of quantum logic or quantum electrodynamics. The individual investigator is nowadays no longer concerned with the terrain as a whole but only with an ever smaller subsector.

But while this is the general situation of the cognitive domain, there is one sector of it that constitutes an exception to the rule. And this, obviously enough, will be that particular subdomain of knowledge that does not have a potential for discovery and for the operation of expertise, that is to say, the sphere of common-sense knowledge.

For as we have seen, the *material* of common sense—the manifold of commonsensical fact—concepts of consideration which, thanks to their very triteness, are stolid, stable truths whose very truality precludes discovery and progress in this

domain and grounds the realm of discovery and progress. (The substantive material of common sense will in this regard differ from the *theory* of common sense as it deals with considerations about common sense rather than belonging to it.)

Accordingly those fields of knowledge which, like the substantive ethics which comprises the norms of conduct of everyday life—and which thereby contrasts with ethical *theory* or *metaethics* as it is often called—stand apart in stable stolidity from the vast majority of the spheres of knowledge where inquiry brings discovery, innovation, and information amplification in its wake.

8. More Historical Background

The idea of *common-sense*[22] beliefs has a long and by no means undistinguished philosophical history. The Sophists launched the idea on its way already in pre-Socratic times. Aristotle in his *Topics* contemplated a class of opinions characterized as *endoxa* that are immediately obvious (*katadêlos*) to virtually everyone of sound judgement.[23] Descartes in his *Discourse on Method* acknowledged the capacity of common sense. The Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid and his school saw common sense as the bedrock on which all human cognition must ultimately rest. And G. E. Moore, the father of analytic philosophy, viewed common sense as

the paradigm of secure conviction and the anvil upon which all sceptical doubt about the prospects of human knowledge is shattered into pieces.[24]

In this history (as often elsewhere) Aristotle was a key figure. In the *Topics* he contrasted scientific knowledge (*epietêmê*) in correlation with demonstrative reasoning (*apodexis*) with the common knowledge (*endoxa*) correlative with plausible (or "dialectical") thinking (*ta dialektika*). What is at issue with this common knowledge is generally accepted opinion of all or most of the well informed (*toi sophoi*). This latter category of lower grade "knowledge" thus stands in contrast with the genuine knowledge possessed by scientific experts whose understanding cuts through to the root of the relevant issues. As Aristotle saw it, this common knowledge is of a distinctly inferior grade, and rational thinkers should not really settle for it except as a second-rate make-do surrogate in these matters where genuine scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) is not to be had. For realistically—and perhaps unfortunately—scientific understanding is on some issues unavailable. For, as Aristotle insisted:

> A discussion is adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of. For precision is not to be sought for alike everywhere. . . . We must be content in speaking of some

> subjects . . . to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and so in speaking about things which are only for the most part true . . . to reach conclusions that are no better. . . . It is thus the mark of educated man to look for precision in each class of things just insofar as the nature of the subject admits. It is clearly equally foolish to accept probable (*pithanon*) conclusions from a mathematician and to demand scientific rigor (*apodexis*) from an orator (*Nicomachean Ethics* I, ii, 3; 1094a12).

As Aristotle thus saw it, in commonplace matters commonplace contentions can and should be accepted.

Philo of Larissa (ca. 160 BC-ca. 85 BC) was a philosopher of the Middle Academy and a followers of Arcesilaos and Carneades who gave the idea of common sense a novel twist. He followed the sceptical school in rejecting the Stoics' certain and irrefrangible *catateptic perceptions*, and accepted the probable or plausible opinions (*to eulogon* or *to pithanon*) of the Middle Academy. Such plausible propositions are based directly on sense experience, whose impact is *revelatory* in their bearing rather than evidential (i.e., inferentially mediated). Accordingly, Philo endorsed the idea of a directly mind-authenticated rather than sensorily mediated perception—but one that issued in plausibility rather than truth as such. And this was something

that he found particularly prominent in the sphere of ethics and morality. Philo's "doctrine" of a plausibility accessed through direct apprehension is thus a clear precursor of common-sense realism.[25]

With the Scottish school of Reid and his followers, the medieval doctrine of an observational common sense was abandoned in favor of a concentration on judgmental common sense. Common sense, so Reid insists, is not a matter of sensation (of apprehending the qualities of things) but of judgment (of endorsing propositional claims as true). He writes: "Sense in its most common, and therefore its most proper meaning, signifies *judgment*, though philosophers often use it in another meaning. From this it is natural to think that common sense should mean common judgment, and so it really does" (EIP VI, ii: 423a). The Scottish school accordingly envisioned common sense as in effect: "A power of the mind which perceives truth, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instinctive and instantaneous impulse" (Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, Pt. I, ch. I). So regarded, common sense represents a capacity for the apprehension of self-evident truth in human experience in factual and ethical matters. Reid's examples of common-sense beliefs include: every event has a cause, people have some control over their actions

and decisions, qualities perceived by the sense have a rooting in some body or substance.

Reid maintained that a common-sense belief (1) is universally held by mankind, (2) is enshrined in the way people use language, (3) is such that its denial is not just false but absurd (so that even theorists who would deny it are nevertheless obliged to act as though it were true), and (4) is self-evidentiating in that one does not accept it on account of its possession of other pre-established facts but rather because of its own nature.

Reid quotes with approval Lord Shaftesbury's contention:

> That some moral and philosophical truths are so evident in themselves, that it would be easier to imagine half of mankind run mad, and joined precisely in the same species of folly than to admit any thing as truth which should be advanced against such natural knowledge, fundamental reason, or common sense."[26]

And Reid emphatically insists that there can be no meaningful disagreement or conflict between common sense and reason, because one of the key functions of human reason:

> is to judge of things self-evident . . . [and just this] is the province, and the sole province of common sense . . . [which is thus] only

> another name for one branch or one degree of reason.[27]

The 20th century philosopher who leaned most heavily on the Scottish school of common-sense philosophizing was G. E. Moore. In his essay "A Defense of Common Sense" (1925) and "The Proof of the External World" (1939) he explicitly followed in the footsteps of Thomas Reid. We know with certainty that the common-sense view of the world (which he sketches in some detail) is true: there are tables and chairs in the world—and human beings with whom we can communicate. Even to speak, however dismissively, of "the common-sense view" of things is already to admit its truth: the expression has sense only when there are people who hold views in common, and this presupposes that the common-sense view is true.

As this sketch indicates, the conception of common-sense belief has, in one form or another, playd a substantial role in deliberations about huma knowledge throughout th history of philosophy.

II

The Rationale of Common-Sense Knowledge

1. The Limited Range of Common Sense

Immanuel Kant objected to the Scottish philosophy of common sense that it fails to address Hume's concerns. Where such a commonsensical conception as that of the cause-and-effect relationship is concerned, he said, Hume did not deny its utility or indeed even indispensability, but its rational legitimacy.[28] It is not in contention *that* we should follow common sense, but *why*.

To reject common-sense claims is not just to open the door to error, but is a violation of the basic demands of elemental intelligence. In contexts of belief, action, and evaluation, common sense is determined by "what makes good, rational sense:" it is not so much a matter of *perceptive* judgment as one of reasonable or *good* judgment. The coin has two sides here: following the call of common sense is generally the rational thing to do, and it "is only common sense" to do what rationality recommends.

The commonsensical commitments that function in human cognitive and evaluative experience—and that are characteristic of such experi-

ence—constitute the core of our world-view at the level of our pre-theoretical undertaking of the world and our place within it. The contrast to common sense is utter foolishness on the one side and, on the other, the technical knowledge of those domains that admit of expertise. For the evident truths that are at issue with common-sense knowledge are neither the technical issues of science and engineering nor the highly complex issues of economics or social planning. Rather they relate to our everyday affairs and the "ordinary course of things." Accordingly, they fall into a variety of major groups of which the following are prime examples:

- observational experience ("That is an apple," "There is a red glow yonder," "This is a human hand before me," "I am sitting in a darkened room").
- self-awareness ("I am awake," "I am thinking about philosophy," 'I am worried about my friend").
- recollection and memory ("I saw John earlier today," "We learned that process in the fourth grade").
- incontrovertibly obvious facts of common life ("there are dogs in the worlds," "Ducks can fly," "Other people can think.")

Common-sense belief is generally seen as neither a matter of sophisticated reasoning nor elaborate inquiry but merely a matter of *good judgment* (*gesunder Menschenverstand*). In general, such things "go without saying" since they would not

tell interlocutors something that they do not already know. On this basis, ordinary usage—joined by a substantial realm of philosophical usage as well—regards common sense as ordinary sagacity and prudence so that common sense is seen as encompassing the judgments, evaluations, and principles of decision and action that "any sensible person"—virtually the whole of adult mankind—would accept in the circumstances. We are rationally entitled to see it as a plausible presumption that the people we deal with are aware of common-sense facts—that they can be credited with a knowledge of common-sense matters. And we are also entitled to see those commonsensical facts as true.

Accordingly, common sense is a matter of judgment—both as to what is the case and as to what is to be done. There are thus not only common-sense beliefs but common-sense injunctions as well, namely, those that enjoin courses of action whose appropriateness is inherent in common-sense beliefs. The normative domain in which common sense is most decidedly at home is that of *prudence*—so much so that in many contexts common sense and the rational self-interest at issue with "ordinary prudence" are amply identified. And the reason for this is clear enough. After all, everyone learns at mother's knee the elemental principles involved in doing what has to be done

for the sake of one's welfare and well-being. And virtually everybody soon enough takes to heart the lessons involved in managing to "look after Number One." The elements of prudence are the very model and paradigm of the "facts of life" known to people-in-general that characterize the substance of common sense. Some examples of common-sense injunctions are:

- not to let small children play unattended on the banks of a deep stream with dangerous currents.
- not to light matches in a gas-filled room.
- to take one's umbrella when the sky is full of rain-clouds.

Such common-sense injunctions guide people towards obvious advantages. All of them are matters of common sense that implement general principles of common-sense procedure. And they have this status simply because "Everybody knows"—and any even minimally intelligent person would be *expected* to know—of the dangers (threats to life, well-being, property) or negativities (unpleasant consequences) that arise in such circumstances.

Some writers think that the legitimacy of common sense is annihilated by the potential systemic shortcomings that do (or can) afflict the overall set of beliefs endorsed by common sense—features such, for example, as ambigu-

ity, equivocation, and even inconsistency.[29] But as extensive study of the logic of induction and evidential reasoning serves to show, such features afflict our inquiries in general: in this regard common sense is at no disadvantage vis-à-vis the products of rational inquiry in general. Quite to the contrary—as noted elsewhere the generally imprecise contentions of common sense are far less vulnerable and revisable than the detailed claims of the "exact science."

2. The Authority of Common Sense

Common sense is a realistic guide in matters of what to think and what to do. But how does common sense obtain such probative authority? After all, why respect common sense? Don't we sophisticates know better than the common run of people?

The credibility of common sense is bound up with the fact that its validity prevails only in a very limited domain, based as it is, on the ordinary course of the everyday life of people-in-general. The crux of common sense is what ordinary people ordinarily think and do in response to the functional requirements of our world setting. The issues that can be decided on common-sense considerations are neither the technical issues of science and engineering nor the highly complex issues

of economics or social planning. Rather, they relate to what transpires within the sphere of our work-a-day affairs and the "ordinary course of things" in everyday life. And precisely because common sense is based on ordinary everyday experience of people-in-general, the bulk of whom are bound to be ordinary everyday individuals, it represents a domain from which expertise is excluded, one in which the learned enjoy no particular advantage over the vulgar—no doubt to the consternation of the former.

But does the fact that what seems obvious to one person need not seem so to another mark common sense as fundamentally subjective? By no means! For common sense is not constituted by what people commonly see as obvious, any more than being a banana is constituted by coming in what looks to be a banana skin. This sort of thing is at best *evidence*, it is not what the factor at issue is all about. Common sense is a matter of what is available to all on the basis of shared experience. Commonality and p̄utative obviousness are at best evidential *induction* for our common-sense beliefs: they are not defining features of what is at issue.

Common-sense beliefs encompass only the obvious (truistic) convictions of the ordinary resources of ordinary people about every-day matters of observation, self-awareness, reasoning, and common experience. To say of some contention

that it is "only common sense" is to say that even "the man in the street" would and should regard it as an incontestable fact that is virtually self-evident. Thus what marks commonsensical propositions as straightforwardly acceptable as true is not the failproof operation of our cognitive facilities but the obviousness of the issues—their straightforward and effectively trivial nature —which makes questioning this sort of thing something that would mark one as a fool or a madman in the sight of ordinary people. It is, to all intents, an act of epistemic self-destruction because to abstain from endorsing a common-sense principle is to vitiate the whole cognitive project, so that the whole venture of securing information about the world we live in would fall apart.

To be sure, the claims of common sense do not have the backing of some sort of necessitation that guarantees their irrefragable certainty. But what they do have in their favor is a powerful presumption. Only under very unusual conditions and only in the face of the most potent counter-indications should the claims of common sense be set aside. The claims of common sense encompass what a rational and reasonable individual would abandon only in exponentially extreme circumstances and conditions. In sum, common-sense contentions are not categorical certitudes but powerful presumptions.

It must, of course, be acknowledged that the experts will "know better" in any and all matters that actually admit of expertise. But nevertheless there remains an important distinction between expertise-admitting and expertise-resisting issues. With respect to expertise-admitting matters there is indeed no particular reason to think that the informal "common-sense" judgment of people-in-general has any probative significance or substantiative weight. Here experience teaches us that common sense will prove insufficient. But with common-life issues the situation is quite different. After all, with the everyday issues of everyday life where common experience can settle the issues there is no expertise—common sense is our best resource here and for that very reason deserves to be heeded. (That itself is just common sense.) What "knowledgeable people" know better than the rest of us is not, surely, the plain-as-your-nose facts of everyday life but rather the technical issues outside the realm of common sense.

However, while common sense is a sound and reliable guide, this is so only in the limited realm of everyday issues. Common sense does not resolve conundrums—it does no more (but also no less!) than to afford straightforward answers to commonplace issues. For as Jules Lachelier sensibly observed: "since man is [on balance] a reasonable being, the odds are that that which people in gen-

eral think (at any rate in those matters that affect people in general) will not be unreasonable."[30] The cogency of common sense is inseparably connected to the narrowness of its range.

The position at issue here is close to that which C. S. Peirce characterized as his own "critical commonsensism."[31] In agreement with Thomas Reid, Peirce accepted the special status of the commonplace truths endorsed by ordinary people in the ordinary course of life's affairs, but he qualified his common sense as *critical* because he did not see these propositions as certain and incorrigible.[32] After all, even Reid did not think that common sense is absolutely infallible: we know full well that while "the evidence of our own eyes" deserves trust, there are various circumstances emphasized by skeptics since antiquity where even this deceives us, and where (for example, the bent look of the straight stick held at an angle under water). As Reid emphasized, the salient point is that in going against the indications of common sense one encounters a burden of proof so heavy that it can only rarely be discharged, seeing that this would require something decidedly powerful and rather special.[33] For, the instructions of common sense are by nature such that they should—and in general will—meet the test of tenability through experience within the wider context of our knowledge.

3. A Domain Justification of Common Sense

With respect to the acceptability of common sense, two questions come to the foreground:

- What does common sense ask us to accept?
- What legitimates these demands as appropriate?

The first issue is straightforward. What common sense asks us to accept is those trite facts that we have (or should have) "learned at mother's knee." But the second issue is more difficult. For just how does common-sense ground its claims to cogency? If its crux is a matter of general practice and usage, how do these get to carry justifactory weight? The answer here lies in considering two factors, *purpose* and *experience*, as they function in the context of meeting human needs.

What we encounter in the sphere of general practice and usage invariably relates to an aim—a purpose or function of some sort. And there human needs come to the foreground. In the end, matters of custom and usage are only able to exist by persisting, by propelling themselves down the corridor of time through its becoming manifest to people in the course of experience that they can serve to meet human needs efficiently and effectively. Their very status as an established practice accordingly betokens their factual efficacy. Man

is a creature whose *modus operandi* evolves in the course of rational selection under the pressure of purposive efficacy. The validity of those established cognitive practices and customs is accordingly something that they wear on their sleeves: their appropriateness is manifested by the very fact of their being what they are—established customs and practices.

Common sense thus has an evolutionary aspect. On evolutionary principles of *natural* selection, the salient features that define a type of organism—a biological species—are the product of a process of natural selection subject to the reproductive non-transmission of the "unfit"—those (physically) unsuited to survive in the prevailing environmental condition. On evolutionary principles of *cultural* selection, by contrast, various cognitive instrumentalities are the product of a process of rational elimination, the cultural non-transmission of the "unfit" instrumentalities that do not effectively serve their intended functions. On this basis, "common-sense beliefs" are not biologically imprinted on the physical/biological constitution of the human mind but are culturally imprinted on the intellectual/cognitive constitution of a human culture. They reflect the thought-stance of people-in-general, yet not on the basis of biophysical considerations but rather on the basis of culturo-cognitive considerations. They are the

fruits of experience—the collective experience of people on a large scale and over a long time, having prevailed in the struggle for cultural survival through providing information that meets the needs of the group. Accordingly, they issue from principles rooted in human culture by means of rational selection. From the standpoint of the species, common-sense principles are not a biologically imprinted universal but a culturally evolved commonality grounded in the collective course of experience, with the truths of common sense reflective of the structure of human experience. And while even communal experience may not be an infallible and failproof resource, it is one that will (and given its rooting in a vastly extensive body of experience must) yield trustworthy results in the vast preponderance of cases relating to matters of everyday affairs.

Of course the cogency of what is generally accepted will not obtain with respect to more sophisticated and technical issues: these by their very nature are not subject to the arbitrament of ordinary everyday experience. But in the arena of commonplace workday affairs, matters are different simply by virtue of their constituting the ordinary stuff of everyday-life experiences. By nature, such matters have to meet the tests that ongoing experience imposes upon them pervasively and often. And so the very fact that a

belief in this realm has been able to establish itself through meeting the demanding test of ongoing experience speaks for validity and cogency. The distinctions and affiliations that are at issue in the principles of common sense are, in Thomas Reid's expression, "those which all mankind in the common business of life have occasion to make."[34] Common sense, in sum, secures its probative status from the fact that a long course of experience, with need-satisfaction related, extending over many generations has spoken in its favor. The general acceptance characteristic of common sense may not be a demonstrative *proof* of correctness, but it is a decidedly positive factor—a very powerful indicator.

But it must always be borne in mind that the range of our common-sense knowledge is distinctly limited. It covers only a very small sector of the overall cognitive domain. The instruments of common sense belong to only one limited section of the large orchestra of our knowledge. Common sense will certainly not answer most of our questions. Recourse to theory and speculation, conjecture and subtle reasoning will often be necessary. But with those limited issues within its proper province, common sense does afford us answers to which we are well advised to pay heed. In *this* domain, at any rate, theory and speculation are most unlikely to do any better by us. And we

would be foolish to yield to any temptation to let their siren call lead us away from the plain offerings of common sense.

4. Some Objections to Common Sense

It is instructive to make a brief survey of some of the stock objections to common sense.

• *Common Sense is Unreliable*

Critics of common sense have constantly argued that it cannot be trusted. There are, so they insist, immeasurable illustrations of situations where common sense leads us astray. Their register of favorite counterexamples to common-sense beliefs includes such matters as

—optical illusions (a straight stick held at an angle under water looks bent).
—the "Gambler's Fallacy" with respect to matters of chance. (After a long series of tails in coin tossing, the chances of a head are better than ever.)
—the discordant reports of different eye witnesses, etc.

In replying to this objection it might perhaps be noted that exactly the same is true of expertise. Take economic forecasts, for example, or even demographic predictions. The long and short of it is that no source of information about the world is immune from error. Not even science!

The history of science is a long litany of changes of mind—of emendations and corrections. After all, scientific progress largely consists in abandoning some aspect of our previous views about how the world works. The theoretical possibility of error is surely insufficient reason to reject the claims of common sense—seeing that we imperfect humans have no cognitive resources at our disposal that is altogether error-proof.

But the key point which, above all, must be made here lies in the crucial distinction between common belief and common sense. For in the end all those examples of the supposed fragility of common sense do not really relate to it at all, but rather to what is merely a matter of common belief.

For there is, of course, no denying that "general opinion" can let us down. ("Man cannot fly," "We shall never be able to see the mountain on the far side of the moon"). But here we must once more return to the already emphasized distinction between common opinion and common sense. What is generally at issue here is in fact a matter of technical achievement rather than one of ordinary human affairs in the dealings of people with one another. And in consequence what can be said on behalf of common sense is failproof---not that it is absolutely reliable but rather that it is just about as reliable as anything we can get hold of. After all,

in the case of common sense we enjoy a substantial advantage. For while even as experience teaches us about where general opinion is unreliable (in the context of those optical illusions, etc.), so it also teaches us about the areas that represent issues with respect to which common sense is trustworthy.

• *Common Sense is Shallow, Trivial, Truistic*

It lies in the nature of common-sense judgments that these are not the products of subtle inquiry and elaborate reasoning but are straightforwardly apprehensible to the untutored mind. Accordingly what common sense tells us is bound to be—despite its evident truth (or at least plausibility)—nevertheless not very informative or interesting. The circumstance that the lessons of common sense are plain and obvious also means that they are unsophisticated. Does this not also mean that they are shallow? Does their being truistic prevent them from being significant and deep?

By no means! For different things are at issue here. Self-evidence (obviousness) is a matter of *antecedence*—of what it takes to get that truth established. Significance or depth on the other hand is a matter of *consequence*—of the range of implications that can be inferred and established once that proposition is in hand. And the consequences that hinge on even an obvious and perspicuous truth can be profound and far-reaching

in their bearing. When Thomas Jefferson wrote "we hold these truths to be self-evident," it was their need for substantiation by means of even more fundamental preliminaries that he rejected, not the need for the elaboration and elucidation of consequences. And the same general situation holds with respect to the truths of common sense.

• *Commonsensical Claims are Uninteresting*

"Surely common sense is not worthy of serious attention. After all, being truistic in nature, common-sense truths aren't particularly interesting." Well . . . yes. Perhaps it may be so. But two points have to be taken into account in this connection. The first is that interest is subjective—unlike importance, it lies in the eyes of the beholder. And since being interesting and being important are two altogether different issues, it follows that even if someone finds common-sense truths to be not particularly interesting this emphatically does not mean that they are not important. And the second point is that even if common-sense truths are regarded as too commonplace to be especially interesting in themselves, this does not mean that truths *about* them cannot be very interesting indeed. Common-sense truths may be trite in themselves but higher level truths about

their nature and purport can and do turn out to be quite significant and intriguing.

• *To Rely on Common Sense is to Shirk Responsibility*
There is also the objection that in endorsing a common-sense position one is fleeing from responsibility by going along in a lemming-like fashion with the herd rather than taking responsibility on oneself and going one's own way. This, however, is a deeply mistaken objection. For in these matters responsibility is inalienable—it follows along with oneself, even as one's shadow does. For irrespective of whether I agree with you, or with the expert, or with people-in-general, the decision to do this—and the responsibility for doing so—rests with me in every case. Thus when I simply accept an expert's judgment, the decision to treat this as authoritative is still mine and the responsibility for it as well. And in treating common-sense judgment as cogent on certain issues, I do not so much resign responsibility to others as to retain it by accepting their position as authoritative with respect to the matter at issue.

• *Relying on Common Sense Hampers Innovation*
But if common sense deals in commonplaces, does accepting it not impede originality, inventiveness, creativity? No!—certainly not in any harmful way. After all, common sense is at work only

with respect to a very restricted range of fact. It functions only with respect to matters of everyday commonplace, and it is not here that originality is needed, seeing that here experience has doubtless done its salutary work. Where the issues are commonplace, there common sense is likely to be our best guide, and there is little point in "trying to reinvent the wheel." With commonplace situations common sense comes into its own.

The province of common sense certainly has limits. And common sense itself is clearly aware of this and makes no effort to stand in the way of innovation in the vast regions that it recognizes as beyond its reach. In fact, with respect to that enormous domain where expertise comes into play and where originality and creativity are needed, it is only commonsensical to endorse the need for novel resources beyond the range of what it itself is able to afford.

* * *

The long and short of it is that with *common sense* properly understood and with its inherent limitations properly acknowledged, the entire litany of the standard objections to acknowledging its cogency and relying on its guidance can in fact be met.

This page intentionally left blank

III

Certainty and Scepticism in the Light of Common Sense

1. Certainty as a Condition of Knowledge

While common-sense knowledge is knowledge of a very special and limited kind, it is nevertheless a mode of knowledge. And in deliberating about knowledge, one does well to begin by recognizing some basic linguistic facts about how the verb "to know" and its cognates actually function in the usual range of relevant discourse. It would clearly be self-defeating to turn away from *knowledge* as we in fact conceive and discuss it and deal with some sort of so-called "knowledge" different from that whose elucidation is the very reason for being of our deliberations. For if one neglects these facts, then one is well en route to "changing the subject" and talking about something different from that very conception which must be our focus when it is indeed *knowledge* that concerns us. If an analysis is to elucidate a conception that is in actual use, it has no choice but to address itself to that usage and attend to its actual characteristics.

Accordingly one cannot say somebody actually knows something of which they are not absolutely

sure. It is literally senseless to say "*x* knows that *p*, but has some small reservations about it" or "*x* knows that *p*, but he is not quite certain of it." Moreover, to say that someone knows something is to claim that it is certain in an impersonal and objective sense of the term. The crucial issue is not what is accepted, but what is *worthy* of acceptance. ("I am certain that *p*" is an interesting claim about a person's autobiography: his psychological attitude. "It is certain that *p*" is a claim about the objective epistemic situation.) It is senseless to say things like: "*x* knows that *p*, but it is not certain that *p*" or "*x* knows that *p*, but *p*'s being so is not a sure thing" or "*x* knows that *p*, but it is merely probable that *p*," or "*x* knows that *p*, but there is some chance that *p* is not so." (To be sure, an element of an "internal" uncertainty may yet remain—I may not know a person's exact age, but only that it is between 25 and 30 years. But then this fact itself of the age's lying in the interval 25-30—is something that must be certain.)

Moreover, knowledge is absolutistic in other ways as well. It does not admit of any qualification or abridgement. One cannot say things like: "*x* knows that *p*, but *p* is only approximately true," or "*x* knows that *p*, but that's not quite the way it is." Knowledge must be exact: it can only be maintained in the context of accuracy and precision. To be sure, this again holds only from the

claim-externalized standpoint. The thesis at issue (here schematized as p) may itself well be imprecise or approximate or inexact. Thus one may know merely that "His name is something like 'Smith'" or "His age is around 30 years" or the like. One can say of the man who knows the decimal value of π to be 3.14??? . . . that "He knows that π is approximately 3.1 but does not know its value any more precisely." Again, one can say of the man who knows the book is in the room that he knows the book is in the room (i.e., someplace in the room) even though he does not know exactly where in the room it is to be found. Our knowledge can be more or less precise without compromise to its status as knowledge. But here we must again recognize the difference between the proximate and the remote placement of the qualification. One can "know that the value of π is approximately 3.1" but one cannot "know approximately that the value of π is 3.1." Any talk of approximate or imprecise knowledge must keep the qualifier removed from the knowledge as such and attached merely to what is known.

Authentic knowledge must be uncontaminated with imperfection: it must be *indefectible*—to use J. H. Newman's helpful term. Its requirements are therefore decidedly demanding.

Nevertheless, its commitment to such conditions of absolutistic import (certainty, precision,

etc.) is a crucial aspect of the nature of knowledge in general—common-sense knowledge included. This absolutism is an Achilles' heel that endows knowledge-claims with some point of vulnerability and are music to the ear of the sceptic in his rejection of common-sense knowledge. What can be said in its defense?

2. The Sceptic's "No Certainty" Argument

How can we ever manage to rule out all certainty-defeating possibilities? Do we, for example, know for sure that the person who jumps off the Empire State Building will crash downwards? Why should he not float gently skywards? This would, no doubt, surprise us, but surprises do happen in life; in such matters of generalization "we may be in no better position than the chicken which [after many happy days in the farmyard] unexpectedly has its neck wrung."[35] After all, the sceptic insists:

> None of us, for example, has explored every corner of the universe to make sure that there nowhere exists a malicious but powerful individual who controls the movements of the sun by means of wires which are too fine to be detected by any of our microscopes. None of us can be sure that there is no such Controller who, in order to play a joke with the human race,

> will prevent the sun from rising tomorrow. Equally, none of us can be sure that there is nowhere a powerful individual who can, if he wishes, regulate the movement of human bodies by means of ropes which are too thin to be detected by any of our present instruments. None of us therefore can be sure that when a man jumps out of the Empire State Building he will not be drawn skyward by the Controller of Motion.[36]

And even without appeal to Cartesian demonology, how can we ever justifiably hold that any of our claims to factual knowledge are secure and certain?

We thus seem to be caught in the inexorable grip of the sceptic's "No Certainty" Argument:[37]

1. All knowledge-claims are committed to a demand for absolute certainty.
2. Objective factual claims are always evidence-transcending: they are never in a position to meet absolutistic demands.

   Our objective factual claims can never amount to actual *Knowledge*.

How is this sort of sceptical argumentation to be defeated, seeing that it emerges from the undeniable fact that knowledge has decidedly demanding requirements?

3. How Absolutes Enter in: Common-Senes Caution about Certainty

The crux of the matter is that in deliberating about scepticism one must distinguish between mundane or practical (or "effective") certainty on the one hand, and transcendental or categorical (or "rigid") certainty on the other. The former claims certainty "beyond any *reasonable* doubt," the latter claims certainty "beyond any *possible* doubt at all—be it reasonable or otherwise." But the certainty that is at issue with knowledge is of the former, and not necessarily of the latter kind. It is the certainty of ordinary life, the certainty of contentions like "There are rocks in the world," "Houses can be built of bricks," "All men have bodies," etc., the sorts of claims that are the staple we live in.

The supportive grounding of actual knowledge claims must of course be conclusive, but, as J. L. Austin very properly asks:

> Why on earth should one think that such verification can't ever be conclusive? If, for instance, you tell me there's a telephone in the next room, and (feeling mis-trustful) I decide to verify this ... I can take it to pieces a bit and find out, or actually use it for ringing some-body up - and perhaps get them to ring me up too, just to make sure.[38]

What is at issue here is an *attainable* conclusiveness—one that suffices, and suffices not just for everyday or practical purposes, but for all sensible purposes. (And what is at issue here may well differ in context—the requisite checks to establish that a telephone is present may be one thing in an office and another on the magician's stage.) To claim knowledge we must do "everything that can reasonably be asked" to ensure not just the plausibility but the certainty of the claim at issue. But this must not be misconstrued to mean (as the sceptic would sometimes seem to have it) that the claims at issue must be secured beyond unreasonable doubts as well.

Consider the example of a dialectical situation of a knowledge-claim subject to sequential challenges:

A. This is a pen.
B. Are you quite certain?
A. Of course.
B. Do you actually *know* it?
A. Yes, quite so.
B. But how can you be sure it's not something done with mirrors?
A. I brought it in myself two hours ago and it's in my pocket, and I've used it. So I think the mirror possibility can safely be eliminated.
B. But are you sure no one has put a clever pen-substitute in its place?

A. No one has been here until you came, and I've been working with it.
B. But what if a wicked Cartesian demon has been deceiving you in all this?
A. ?!?!?!

It is clear that when the challenger has been pushed to his final move here he has "overstepped the bounds" of reasonable doubt, and has left the sphere of plausible challenges based upon real prospects of error, pursuing the will-of-the-wisps of purely theoretical and altogether hyperbolic worriments. (We need not be in a position positively to rule out uncannily real dreams, deceitful demons, powerful evil scientists operating from other galaxies, etc.) And one can easily construct other such dialogical exercises, all yielding the same lesson: that in such interrogative situations, the series of challenges is soon forced to a recourse to absurdity. One reaches the level of obstacles which it is in principle impossible to remove and whose removal cannot for that very reason reasonably be demanded.

The key point is that the terminology of our everyday discourse—knowledge claims included—is governed by common-sense principles of ordinary usage. For our epistemological procedures—explanation, substantiation, justification, and the rest—are all essentially social acts performed in the context of a communal interchange of ideas

and information that is subject to communally established ground-rules. A fundamental communicative purpose underlies all these probative activities. The end of the road of the process of justification is obviously reached when anything further that could be brought in would be less plausible than what is already at hand. Even as one must not explain by the yet more obscure (*non est explicandum obscurum per obscurius*), so we must not defend the dubious by the yet more dubious. In the preceding dialogue, a stage is reached when the existence of the pen in question is (*ex hypothesi*) something that is as sure under the epistemic circumstances at issue as one could ever be of the further supporting considerations that could be adduced on its behalf. And when this stage is reached, there is no point in going on.[39]

The common sense that is otherwise the object of our deliberations here must also be used with respect to our terminological resources. And it serves to indicate that the certainty of knowledge is the certainty of life—a realistic certainty devoid of any admixture of unattainable absoluteness. For the conception of knowledge with which we standardly operate is an instrumentality of everyday-life communication. As such it has a functional role and use. We must be realistic and pragmatic in our approach to matters of knowledge and certainty.

And in this context it must be acknowledged that common sense gets its "effective" or "practical"—rather than "categorical"—certainty through its imprecision, as Pierre Duhem shrewdly observed:

> A. . . result in physics does not have the same order of certainty as a fact ascertained by non-scientific methods [in ordinary life]. . .[However] a fact established by the procedures of common sense, and not by scientific methods, can be certain only at the expense of not being detailed or minute. . . .With some exception testimony offers assurance only to the extent that it is less precise, less detailed, and sticks to the context and most obvious considerations. . .There is a sort of balance between precision and certainty: one cannot be increased except to the detriment of the other.[40]

One cannot overemphasize this important fact that the certainty of knowledge is the certainty of ordinary life—realistic certainty and not something transcendentally inaccessible.[41] It is the certainty that precludes any realistic possibility of error: any possibility of error that is "worth bothering about," the closing of every loophole that one can reasonably ask for.[42] This is, and must be so because knowledge claims are asserted and denied here, in this world—and not in some

transcendentally inaccessible one, so that the norms and ground-rules governing their use must be appropriately applicable (at least in principle) *hic et nunc* in this imperfect world. For the fact is that in the context of our knowledge claims certainty is never certainty pure and simple, but rather certainty relativized to the particular sort of thing at issue. To say that a claim is certain is to say that it is *as certain as something of its kind could possibly be*. To be sure, certainty is not a matter of degree—one certain thing is not more or less certain than another. But this uncontested fact of noncomparability does not mean that there cannot be different contexts for certainty—that the certainties of Assyriology cannot differ in character from those of biochemistry.

4. Against Scepticism

Sceptical thinkers are wont to launch upon an explication of the "nature of knowledge" which sets the standards of its attainment so high that it becomes in principle impossible for anything to meet such hyperbolic demands. Against this tendency it is proper to insist that while what is known must indeed be true—and certainly true—nevertheless the conceptions at issue can and should be so construed that there are realistic and realizable circumstances in which our claims

to certainty and to knowledge are perfectly legitimate and altogether justified. A doctrine which admits the defeasibility of quite appropriate claims to knowledge need involve no contradictions in terms. In requiring certainty of knowledge we cannot put the demands of common sense into suspension.

The assertion "I know that *p*" does indeed have all of those absolutistic-sounding facets we have considered (certainty, unqualifiedness, etc.). All are ineliminably parts of the substance of the claim as asserted in its meaning-content. But with this particular factual claim, as with any other, warranted assertability does not demand anything that cannot in private be delivered. *Ex hypothesi*, one can appropriately assert "I know that *p*" only when one has adequate rational warrant for this assertion. But any temptation to scepticism must be tempered by considerations of common sense in relation to adequate warrant. For example, we need not in the usual course of things exert ourselves in an endeavor to rule out the imaginative sceptic's recourse to the whole demonology of uncannily real dreams, deceitful demons, powerful evil scientists, etc. The general principles and presumptions of the domain suffice to put all this aside. To claim knowledge in specific cases, all we need do is eliminate those case-specific consider-

ations which would countervail against the claim at issue.

To be sure, a sceptical objection may well be offered:

> If we sometimes fall into error even when doing the best we can, how can we tell that we have not done so in the present case? And if we cannot have a failproof guarantee of truth, then how can we speak of knowledge?

The answer is simple. If we have done all that can reasonably be asked of us, the best that can realistically be done, then there can be no need for any further assurance. The objection suggests that we must be in a position to do better than the best we can. And of course we cannot possibly do so—and so this must not be asked of us, seeing that it makes no sense to ask for the impossible (*Ultra posse nemo obligatur*).

It must be recognized that in general two fundamentally different kinds of misfortunes are possible in situations where risks are run and chances taken:

1. We reject something that, as it turns out, we should have accepted. We decline to take the chance, we avoid running the risk at issue, but things turn out favorably after all, so that we lose out on the gamble. (Type 1 error: improper negatives.)

2. We accept something that, as it turns out, we should have rejected. We do take the chance and run the risk at issue, but things go wrong, so that we lose the gamble. Type 2 error: false positives.)

Any cognitive policy, process or method for resolving questions in a certain problem domain has its characteristic balance of asset and error. What we must do—and what alone makes sense—is to adopt that process which offers one the best available prospects. ("That's just common sense!") And in this regards the endorsement of common sense is our best bet—our best available option.

The standard economic concern for cost-effectiveness is operative throughout the cognitive domain. Rational inquiry is pervasively subject to the economic impetus to securing maximal product for minimal expenditure. Concern for answering our questions cogently in the most straightforward, most cost-effective way is a crucial aspect of cognitive rationality in its economic dimension.

And so why accept the claims of common sense as authentic truths? Simply because it is a rational policy. That is to say economic rationality enjoins adopting the policy that will efficiently secure an optimal balance of information over misinformation, usable truth over useless error. And heeding the voice of common sense is part and parcel of such a policy.

To call common-sense knowledge into question is to impugn the most secure knowledge we have and thus to call into question the very possibility of knowledge. It is, in effect, to be a sceptic of a rather radical stripe, seeing that to deny common sense is, in effect, to deny the very possibility of knowledge. And, *e contra*, to accept common sense is to accept at face value much of what ordinary people ordinarily take themselves to know.

This difference between real and merely conjectural possibilities of error is crucial for rational warrant for claims or concessions to knowledge. A real possibility must be case- specific and not abstractly generic and somehow based on general principles alone. And this, it must be insisted, is not incompatible with the existence of a "purely theoretical" (let alone "purely logical") prospect of error. There is thus no real anomaly in holding on the one hand that knowledge "must be certain" (in the effective sense of this term) and on the other that a valid knowledge claim "might possibly be wrong" (with "might" construed in the light of a merely theoretical prospect on the basis of "general principles").

Some philosophers have endeavored to evade scepticism by emptying knowledge claims of any and all pretensions to certainty. For example, in his interesting book, *Knowledge*, Keith Lehrer writes:

> Thus, our theory of knowledge is a theory of knowledge without certainty. We agree with the sceptic that if a man claims to know for certain, he does not know whereof he speaks. However, when we claim to know, we make no claim to certainty. We conjecture that to speak in this way is a departure from the most customary use of the word "know." Commonly, when men say they know, they mean they know for certain. . . .[43]

But this approach of extruding certainty from knowledge—and so of going over to a construction of knowledge at variance with that of our standard usage—avoids scepticism at too high a price. What more, after all, can the sceptic ask than to be granted that his position is correct with respect to the standard, most customary use of the word "know"? To win this battle is to win the war. By contrast, the line of thought at work in the present deliberations emphatically preserves the certainty-involvement of all our knowledge claims. It simply insists that the certainty of knowledge—common-sense knowledge included—is the realistic certainty of life as best we can achieve it amidst the difficult circumstances of an uncooperative world.

Accordingly, the sceptic's "No Certainty" Argument becomes invalidated through the consideration that our reasonable knowledge claims are emphatically *not* committed to a demand for absolute certainty in any hyperbolically inaccessible way. They are indeed committed to a demand for certainty, but this "certainty" must be construed realistically—in the effective, mundane, and practical sense of the term. The certainty at issue with claims to knowledge is not inherently unattainable; it is simply that the grounding in hand must be strong enough to indicate that further substantiation is superfluous in the sense of providing every reasonable assurance that the thing at issue is as certain as something of its sort need appropriately be. To reemphasize: the demands we can impose upon our knowledge are and must be reasonable ones. And considerations of common sense stand in the foreground here because we must be commonsensical about the sort of certainty that knowledge itself will appropriately require.[44]

This page intentionally left blank

IV

Common Sense, Trust, and Communication

1. The Advantages of Cooperation

"Why should the common sense reflected in the beliefs of people-in-general carry any weight with me?" The flippant reply here is "What is so special about me that what is accepted by them should not be acceptable to me?" But the deeper and better reason is that it is both proper and expedient that I should have trust in them. No other single consideration speaks as strongly for accepting common sense as the need for and desirability of trust in others in the management of our own affairs—cognitive and practical alike. Given our individual status as fallible and imperfect individuals, we do well to test our own potentially idiosyncratic opinions against those of our fellows—a test which will hardly be met more decidedly than by the sort of cognitive commonality at issue with common sense. And following the teachings of common sense in endorsing what "any sensible person does and should accept in the circumstances" is at the same time an exercise in trust—in having confidence in the cognitive competency of our fellows.[45]

The Scottish common sensists viewed trust in their usual way in terms of a natural, innate tendency to believe other people.[46] But it would be more sensible to rest the matter on a functional rather than psychological basis. For common sense pivots on trust in the "sound judgment" of people in general. An experience-based functionalism speaks for the stance that the views of people-in-general can be trusted—not, to be sure, always and everywhere, but at least with respect to those issues that figure in people's everyday actions and affairs. And the rationale for such trust roots in considerations of the general benefit that it engenders. For we are well advised to concede the credibility of common-sense teachings not because we happen to like them but because there are good reasons for doing so.

Even people who do not much care to cooperate and collaborate with others are well advised in terms of their own interests to suppress this inclination. This point can be brought home by considering the matter from the angle presented in Display 1.

Display 1

A Preferential Overview of Trust Situations

I Trust You	*You Trust Me*	*My Ranking*	*Your Ranking*
+	+	2	2
+	–	4	1
–	+	1	4
–	–	3	3

By hypothesis, each of the parties involved here is inclined to prioritize the situation where they are trusted by the other while they themselves need not reciprocate. And each sees as the worst case a situation where they themselves trust without being trusted in return. Each, however, is willing to trust to avert being mistrusted himself. Relative to these suppositions, we arrive at the overall situation of the interaction matrix exhibited in Display 2. (Here the entry 2/3—for example—indicates that in the particular case at issue the outcome ranks in place 2 for me and in place 3 for you, respectively.) In this condition of affairs, mutual trust is the best available option—the only plausible way to avert the communally unhappy result 3/3.[47] In this sort of situation, cooperative behavior is obviously the best policy. (Thanks to the Uniformity of Reason,

we are, after all, going to end up acting alike since, owing to the symmetry of the situation, whatever constitutes a good reason for you to act in a certain way in the particular circumstances does so for me as well.)

Display 2

An Interaction Matrix for Trust Situations

	You Trust Me	*You Do Not Trust Me*
I trust you	2/2	4/1
I do not trust you	1/4	3/3

And the general point that is at issue here also obtains in specifically cognitive and communicative matters. After all, information is power and its acquisition plays a highly important role in our lives. And here the principle of rational economy with respect to presumptions comes to the fore. It is easily seen that a sceptical presumption—one which rejects trust and maintains a distrustful stance toward the declarations of others—would face us with an enormously complex (and economically impracticable) task in matters of interpersonal communication. For suppose that, instead of treating others on the basis of *innocent until proven guilty*, one were to treat them on lines

of *not trustworthy until proven otherwise*. It is clear that such a procedure would be vastly less economic because we would now have to go to great length in independent verification. The problems here are so formidable that we would be able to obtain little if any informative benefits from the communicative contributions of others.

And if we are certainly going to be best off as a community by sharing in common those beliefs and opinions which, as best we can determine it, deserve endorsement by any reasonable person whatever—then I would do well to place reliance on these standards of judgment on whose basis sensible people at large actually proceed. And this is also going to be the case the other way around. After all, if I expect you to accept something that I say—to endorse it as correct, cogent, and appropriate—then I must of course realize that you are going to apply your standards and to judge the issue by your lights. And for this very reason I had best acknowledge and honor the teachings of common sense in forming those views of mine that I can regard as objectively correct in a way that justifies expecting reasonable people to accept them.

2. Building up Trust: An Economic Approach

Cicero held that while the learned are free to reject common opinion, the public speaker who must keep in touch with his audience would be greatly mistaken in rejecting what the vulgar think.[48] But the fact is that in interpersonal interaction in the forum of ordinary life we are all "public speakers" who must stay in cognitive touch with one another.

The process through which mutual trust in matters of information development and management is built up among people cries out for explanation by means of an economic analogy that trades on the dual meaning of the idea of credit. For we proceed in cognitive matters in much the same way that banks proceed in financial matters. We extend credit to others, doing so at first to only a relatively modest extent. When and if they comport themselves in a manner that shows that this credit was well deserved and warranted, we proceed to give them more credit and extend their credit limit, as it were. By responding to trust in a responsible way, one improves one's credit rating in cognitive contexts much as in financial contexts. The same sort of mechanism is at work in both cases: recognition of credit-worthiness engenders a reputation on which further credit can be based; earned credit is like money in the bank, well worth

the measures needed for its maintenance and for preserving the good name that is now at stake.

And this situation obtains with information sources in general. The example of our senses is a particularly important case in point. Consider the contrast between our reaction to the data obtained by sight on the one hand and dreams on the other. Dreams, too, are impressive and seemingly significant data-affording experiences. Why then do we accept *sight* as a reliable cognitive source but not *dreams*—as people were initially minded to do? Surely not because of any such substantive advantages as vividness, expressiveness, or memorability. The predisposition to an interest in dreams is clearly attested by their prominence in myth and literature. Our confident reliance on sight is not a consequence of the intrinsic attractions of its deliverances but is preeminently a result of its success in building up credit in just the way we have been considering. We no longer base our conduct of affairs on dreams simply because it doesn't pay.

Again, a not dissimilar story even holds for our information-generating technology—for telescopes, microscopes, computing machinery, and so on. We initially extend some credit because we simply must, since they afford our only means for a closer look at the moon, at microbes, and so on. But subsequently we increase their credit limit

(after beginning with a modicum of blind trust) because we eventually learn, with the wisdom of hindsight, that it was quite appropriate for us to proceed in this way in the first place. As we proceed, the course of experience indicates, retrospectively as it were, that we were justified in deeming them creditworthy. And just this same process is also at work with the issue of the justification of common sense.

To be sure, the risk of deception and error is present throughout our inquiries: our cognitive instruments, like all other instruments, are never failproof. Still, a general policy of judicious trust is eminently cost-effective. In inquiring, we cannot investigate everything; we have to start somewhere and invest credence in something. But of course our trust need not be blind. Initially bestowed on a basis of mere hunch or inclination, it can eventually be tested and can come to be justified with the wisdom of hindsight. And this process of testing can in due course put the comforting reassurance of retrospective validation at our disposal.

We know that various highly convenient generalizations regarding knowledge production are simply false:

- What seems to be, is.
- Whatever people say is true.
- The simplest patterns that fit the data are actually correct.

- The most adequate currently available theory will work out.

We realize full well that such generalizations do not hold, unrestrictedly, however nice it might be if they did.[49] Nevertheless we accept the theses at issue as principles of presumption. Accordingly, we follow the metarule: In the absence of concrete indications to the contrary, proceed to implement such principles as though they were true. Our standard cognitive practices incorporate a host of fundamental presumptions of initial credibility in the absence of concrete evidence to the contrary. And it is exactly this that is at issue with the common-sensical principles of practice represented by such instructions as:

- to believe in your own senses.
- to accept at face value the declarations of other people (in the absence of any counterindications and in the absence of any specific evidence undermining their generic trustworthiness).
- to trust in the reliability of established cognitive aids and instruments (telescopes, calculating machines, reference works, logarithmic tables, etc.) in the absence of any specific indications to the contrary.
- to accept the declarations of established experts and authorities within the area of their expertise (again, absent counterindications).

All of these practices of cognitive procedure are simply a matter of common sense. And the justification of these presumptions is not the factual one of the substantive generalization: "In proceeding in this way, you are bound to secure correct information and will not fall into error." Rather, it is methodological justification: "In proceeding in this way, you will efficiently foster the interests of the cognitive enterprise; the gains and benefits will, on the whole, outweigh the losses and costs." For clearly all such cognitive practices have a fundamentally economic rationale. They are all cost-effective within the setting of the project of inquiry to which we stand committed by our place in the world's scheme of things. They are characteristics of the most economically convenient way for us to secure the data needed to resolve our cognitive problems—to secure answers to our questions about the world we live in. And they accordingly prevail because this is maximally cost-effective in comparison with the available alternatives. Just this in the end brings them under the aegis of common sense.

To be sure, whenever we trust, matters can turn out badly. In being trustful, we take our chances (though of course initially in a cautious way). But one must always look to the other side of the coin as well. A play-safe policy to total security calls for not accepting anything, not trusting anyone. But

then we are left altogether empty-handed. Uncompromising insistence on absolute security exacts a terrible price in terms of missed opportunities, forgone benefits, and lost chances. What recommends those inherently risky cognitive policies of credit extension and initial trust to us is not that they offer risk-free sure bets but that, relative to the alternatives, they offer a better balance of potential benefits over potential costs. The fundamentally *economic* rationality of such cognitive practices in point of comparative efficacy and effectiveness provides their ultimate surety and warrant. And exactly this sort of experiential functionalism gives common sense its strongest support.

3. Truthful Communication as a General Benefit Enterprise

The functional rationale for relying on common sense is illustrated with particular vividness in the context of communication.

Suppose I tell you, The cat is on the mat. What information do you now actually have? Is it (1) The cat *is* on the mat? Or is it (2) Rescher *thinks* (believes) that the cat is on the mat? Or is it merely (3) Rescher *says* that the cat is on the mat? In the circumstances under hypothesis, only the last item is wholly unproblematic. And it is clear that one cannot manage to get from (3) to (2) unless

one adds something like (4): When Rescher says something (in a serious tone of voice) he generally believes it. Moreover, you certainly cannot get from (2) to (1) unless you credit me with veracity and trustworthiness and impute to me a penchant for truth—that is, unless you also accept (5): When Rescher believes something to be so (in such matters as cats and mats, at any rate) he is generally right.

The entire process of communication—of deriving substantive information from the declarations of others—involves trust. But what validates this? To answer this question it is best to look at the issue in economic perspective. To derive benefit from the declarations of others, we must (1) listen to them, pay them heed; (2) interpret (decode) what they say; (3) extend them cognitive credit by accepting it. And none of these steps is cost free: each exacts from us an outlay of resources in point of time, effort, attention, and risk of error. All procedures for the acquisition of information—listening, watching, reading, and so on—involve expenditures of some sort. (No school student is ever wholly oblivious to the fact that learning can be painful.) And whether this outlay is warranted depends on the correlative advantages—preeminently including the cognitive benefits of acquired information.

Communication is accordingly predicated on a policy of conceding and maintaining credibility. For communication too is a commercial system of sorts. Credit is extended, drawn upon, and enlarged. And with communicative and financial credit alike, one could not build up credit (prove oneself creditworthy) unless given some credit by somebody in the first place. For credit to be obtainable at all, there has to be an initial presumption that one is creditworthy. Clearly, such a presumption of innocent until proven guilty (i.e., fault free until shown to be otherwise) can be defeated; one can of course prove oneself to be unworthy of credit or credence. But initially the presumption must be made.

The guiding principle here is that of cost-benefit calculation. The standard presumptions that underlie our communicative practices are emphatically not validatable as established facts. (For example, it is certainly *not* true that people say what they mean, save at the level of statistical generality.) But their justification becomes straightforward on economic grounds, as practices that represent the most efficient and economical way to get the job done. For if we do not concede any credit to the declarations of others, then we lose any and all chance to derive informative profit from them, thus denying ourselves the benefit of a potentially useful resource. The course of experi-

ence would then soon teach us that the benefits of trust, of credibility concession, generally overbalance the risks involved.

Not only is maintaining credibility an asset in communication, but some degree of it is in fact a necessary condition for the viability of the whole project. The precept, *Protect your credibility; do not play fast and loose with the ground rules, but safeguard your place in the community of communicators*, is basic to the communicative enterprise.

From the sender's point of view, putting forth a message calls for the expenditure of time, effort, energy, and the like. The rational agent will incur such costs only with a view to benefits—some worth of reward (if only in the respect or gratitude of others) or reciprocity, with a view to a *quid pro quo*. This point is simple but of far-reaching import. Given our need for information to orient us in the world (on both pure and practical grounds), the value of creating a community of communicators is enormous. We are rationally well advised to extend ourselves to keep the channels of communication to our fellows open, and it is well worth expending much for the realization of this end.

And the same sort of story holds for the receivers' point of view as well. They too must expend resources on acquiring, processing, and storing messages. Clearly, a rational hearer would be pre-

pared to undertake this expenditure only if there were a reasonable expectation of drawing profit from it, be it by way of information obtained or pecuniary reward—an expectation which, in general, is amply warranted.

It is clear on this basis that sticking to the commonalties of common sense has substantial utility in the context of communication. And, in particular, we cannot begin to make sense of what we think and say if we do not honor the conventions that define the very language in which our claims and assertions are formed. To use and construe words in their established meanings is of the very essence of common sense. If we cannot trust people in matters of language we cannot trust them at all.

One vivid token of the role of common sense relates to the presumption of rationality. Consider the child-like regress of "why questions" as per the dialogue:

- He went for a walk.
- Why?
- To get exercise.
- Why?
- To maintain good health.
- Why?
- Because that's the sensible thing to do.
- But why be sensible?

Here as elsewhere in such why-regresses a point is soon reached where it is pointless—and totally unnecessary—to continue. Once we reach the juncture of "But that's just common sense; that's what any rational person would want to do or be," there is no point in continuing. Meaningful communication is predicated in presumption of rationality because of its effectiveness for the realization of the purposes at issue.

A communicating community is a sort of marketplace with offerers and takers, sellers and buyers. In accepting the declarations of others at their informative face value, we extend them credit, as it were. The prospect of informative communication is predicated on such principles as: (i) Concede a presumption of veracity to the assertions of others, at any rate until such time as they prove themselves unworthy of credit; and (ii) In communicative contexts, regard others as candid, truthful, accurate, and the like, until proven otherwise. The rationale of such principles of epistemic procedure is largely or wholly economic. For here, as elsewhere, it is ultimately on the basis of considerations of cost-effectiveness that we decide how much credit to extend.

After all, why do we credit people with communicative capacity—with the power to provide information? Note that the purported fact, *When he utters "the cat is on the mat," he is engaged in*

asserting that the cat is on the mat, represents a belief of ours, or at any rate a supposition on our part. We make this supposition initially in desperation, as it were, because it provides the only feasible way for us to derive any benefit from the content of someone's assertions, but ultimately because we eventually accumulate evidence that indicates (with the wisdom of hindsight) that this supposition was well advised (warranted).

In extracting information from the declarations of others we rely on a whole host of working assumptions: (1) People mean to say what they apparently say (what we take them to be saying). (2) People believe what they say. (3) People have good grounds for their beliefs (i.e., there are such grounds and they have cognizance of them). Essentially the same justification obtains throughout: unless we enter into such communicative presumptions, we deprive ourselves of any chance to extract information from the declarations of others. On this basis, we are rationally well advised (for example) to treat their declarations as epistemically innocent until proven otherwise, exactly because this is the most cost-effective thing to do. Our communicative procedures are motivated—and justified—by the essentially profit-seeking objective of extracting the maximum benefit from our information-oriented interactions.

4. Cognitive Community

Only through cooperation based on mutual trust can we address issues whose effective resolution makes demands that are too great for any one of us alone. In the development and management of information, people are constantly impelled toward a system of collaborative social practices—an operational code of incentives and sanctions that consolidates and supports collective solidarity and mutual support. In this division of labor, trust results from what is, to all intents and purposes, a custom-consolidated compact to conduct their affairs in friendly collaboration.

The common-sensical policy of placing reliance on the opinions of people in general thus has a complex rationale. Partly it rests inductively on retrospective *evidential* grounds because it deals with those issues that are appropriate for common-sense consensus but rarely goes wrong by adopting the common-sense line. Partly it is appropriate prospectively for strictly *practical* reasons, because on these questions we often need answers, and common sense provides our most hopeful recourse. Moreover, it can also be validated on *social* grounds because we humans are so constituted that we cannot live in isolation and the creation of a trustful solidarity with our environing fellows is crucial to our well-being and

survival. After all, the recourse to common sense is inherently part and parcel of the basis of that confraternity of trust whose creation and maintenance is essential to humans' well-being. To reject common sense is to create rents in the fabric of trust that is essential to our ongoing existence as the sorts of creatures we are.

Presumptive trust in other people whose word is their bond makes the world of commerce and finance go round, and where it is absent economic prosperity grinds to a halt. And equally in ordinary-life affairs if we were not prepared to have trust in the judgments and opinions of others—at least in matters of ordinary, everyday affairs—we humans could not achieve the sort of orientation and guidance needed for the satisfactory conduct of our own thought and action.

After all, the pursuit of information in ordinary life functions in a manner akin to that of the pursuit of wealth in business transactions. The financial markets in stocks or commodities futures would self-destruct if the principle that *my word is my bond* were abrogated, since no one would know whether a trade had actually been made. In just this way, too, the market in information would self-destruct if people's truthfulness could not be relied upon. Thus in both cases, unreliable people have to be frozen out and exiled from the community. In cognitive and economic contexts

alike, the relevant community uses incentives and sanctions (artificially imposed costs and benefits) to put into place a system where people generally act in a trusting and trustworthy way. Such a system is based on processes of reciprocity that advantage virtually everyone.

Several recent studies illuminate the extent to which we actually depend upon others in our beliefs.[50] For example, the experiments of Solomon Asch have dramatized people's tendency to conform to erroneous public judgments on matters where they would never make mistakes by themselves.[51] His subjects had only to specify which of three lines was closest in length to a given line. People made this judgment unerringly, except when they knew that all the others who were asked the same question concurred in giving a different answer.[52] Commenting on Asch's experiments, Sabini and Silver report: "All (or nearly all) subjects reacted with signs of tension and confusion. Roughly one-third of the judgments subjects made were in error. Nearly 80 percent of the subjects gave the obviously wrong answer on at least one trial. The perception that a few other people made an absurd judgment of a clear, unambiguous physical matter was a very troubling experience, sufficient to cause doubt, and in some cases conformity."[53] Such experiments actually reveal (in their own dishonest way) the extent to which people incline

to trust others. A recent study of American juries arrived at very similar findings.[54] On examining more than 250 jury deliberations, the investigators found that in no case was a hung jury caused by a single dissenter. Unless someone who disagreed with the majority found support by at least two others, the dissenters relaxed their reservations and came around to the majority view.

Such considerations betoken a generally advantageous *modus operandi*, under whose aegis people can trust their fellows in a setting of communal cooperation. Establishing and maintaining a community of inquirers united in common collaboration by suitable rewards and sanctions is a mode of operation that is highly cost-effective. Individual probity and mutual helpfulness are virtues whose cultivation pays ample dividends for the community of inquirers. In these matters, the cold iron hand of individual and communal interest lies behind the velvet glove of etiquette and ethics. The commodity of information illustrates rather than contravenes the division of labor that results from Adam Smith's putative innate human "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange." The market in knowledge has pretty much the same nature and the same motivation as any other sort of market—it is a general-interest arrangement. The establishment of conditions that foster cooperation and trust are critical to the cognitive enterprise

of productive inquiry. Coordinative cooperation evolves because what is in the interests of most is, in most cases, in the interests of each.

And just herein lies the key to answering the question: "Just what is so special about common-sense knowledge? Isn't it just like any other knowledge—only happening to be more widely shared?" Well, clearly one of the things that is special about common-sensical information is that the very fact of its being common sensical serves as an indication that it is particularly well evidentiated. But that is not the end of the matter. For one of the special features of common-sense knowledge is its centrality for the process of communication. For verbal communication to be possible at all there must be shared concepts—a commonality of terminology predicated on a basis of agreement on how things stand in a shared-worlds setting.[55] And so, without a basis of common-sensical knowledge pervasively shared throughout the wider community, the prospect of communication would be abrogated, and the prospect of knowledge—of acquiring, sharing, and transmitting information—would automatically collapse with it.

As these deliberations indicate, the cognitive practices of trust and presumption that underpin our reliance on communal common sense are undergirded by a justificatory rationale whose nature is fundamentally practical and indeed

largely economic. For what is at issue throughout is a system of procedures that assures for each participant the prospect of realizing the greatest benefit for the least cost. The commitment to impersonal standards and interpersonal generality that characterizes the cognitive enterprise is thus an inherently practical matter. Adherence to the standard cognitive practices that privilege common sense is a policy validated by considerations that are in the end, a matter of the rational economy of procedure that lies at the core of pragmatic efficacy.

5. Consensus and Common Sense

The crux of common sensism lies in the idea that with respect to nontechnical issues the views of ordinary people deserve trust. A positive presumption operates in their favor so that some form of consensualism is appropriate in resolving issues in this domain. The following deliberations serve to facilitate the application of this general idea.

Confronted with different versions regarding the facts—different states of belief or opinion—how are we to proceed? How are we to reconcile different versions of the facts? What is the best way to proceed? How is one to effect a rational synthesis of discordant views regarding the facts of the matter.

Four principal alternatives come to the fore:

I. *Invariantism*. Accept whatever (and *only* whatever!?) is accepted on *all* versions. This equates acceptability with unanimosity.

II. *Majoritarianism*. Go with the majority: accept whatever (and only whatever!?) the majority accepts.

III. *Convergentism*. Identify that version (or those versions) that agree most extensively with others, and then, focusing exclusively on these, proceed via I or II.

IV. *Eliminationism*. Identify that version (or those versions) that disagree *least* extensively with others. Eliminate these from consideration! And now proceed via I or II.

Consider, for example, a microgroup of five individuals (A-E) who hold varying views with regard to the acceptability of five propositions (p, q, r, s, t), as per Display 1.

Display 1

	p	q	r	s	t
A	+	+	-	+	+
B	-	+	+	+	-
C	+	-	+	+	-
D	+	-	-	+	-
E	+	+	+	+	-

Note that we have the following situation that obtains in point of agreement between our individuals.

1. A agrees with others 10 times
2. B agrees with others 11 times
3. C agrees with others 13 times
4. D agrees with others 12 times
5. E agrees with others 13 times

Thus C, D and E stand out in terms of maximal agreement with others, and when these alone are considered, the results indicated in Display 2 for Most- and All-Convergentism will ensue accordingly. And as regards Eliminationism, once A is eliminated, the results indicated in Display 2 for All- and Most-Eliminationism will ensue.

On this basis, the acceptability status of our five propositions will be as per Display 2.

Display 2

	p	q	r	s	t
I. Invariabilism	?	?	?	+	?
II. Majoritarianism	+	+	+	+	-
III. All-Convergence	+	?	?	+	-
IV. Most-Convergence	+	?	+	+	-
V. All-Elimination	+	?	?	+	-
VI. Most-Elimination	+	-	+	+	-

It is of course possible now to repeat the entire process with respect to the different (non-individual) parties involved in Display 2, so that, for example, a Majoritarian result for all the different resolution-methods would lead to:

p	q	r	s	t
+	?	?	+	-

An alternative possibility is that after the situation of Display 2 is arrived at, one can follow the rather conservative quasi-universalistic second-order rule:

- Accept where there is no - entry
- Reject where there is no + entry
- Suspend otherwise

In the present case this would lead to the result:

p	q	r	s	t
+	?	+	+	-

It should be noted that neither of these second-order majoritarian results is quite the same as that achieved for first-order majoritarianism.

The point is that while a common-sense approach to different versions of the truth does

not simply demand a statistical, count-the-noses majoritarianism, it will, however, involve some plausible process for detecting a consensus and will rely on the guidance of such consensuality in resolving a disputed issue.

And of course further complications to resolve issues of rational coherence must be taken into account. Thus consider the situation of Display 3.

Display 3

	p	q	p —> q
A	+	+	+
B	+	-	+
C	-	-	-

Clearly we cannot here follow the lead of a naïve majoritarianism that would have us accept p and p q and reject q. Where the properties at issue have inferential interdependence, these must be taken into account where we are applying our standards of acceptability-determination.

Even where the matters at issue are relatively simple and straightforward, the determination of

a variable common-sensical consensus can fail to be straightforward and automatic, since not just agreement but *rational* consensus will have to be our object. To be sure, the rational determination of common-sensical convergence is not simply a matter of counting ballots. But the fact remains that for a sensible common-sensism the determination of a (rationally consensual) conclusion represents a pivotal factor in acceptability determination.

6. Common Sense and Communication

In its most basic essentials, at least, a common-sense view of the world is built into the way in which everyday language works. Without a manifold of common-sense suppositions linguistic communication would become impossible. And so the very fact that effective communication is not only possible but comparatively simple gives probative support to a common-sense view of things. The concepts we employ in everyday communication generally develop against the background of an understanding of how things work in the world (or better, are taken by us to work); they are tied to a view of the realities of nature and to the empirical detail of actually existing practices. Anyone who is genuinely concerned for the elucidation of our concepts as we actually use them in this context

must accordingly bear in mind that the conceptual scheme that is their native habitat is not an abstract logicians' tool for dealing with the endless ramifications of an infinite spectrum of theoretical possibilities but an historically developed product arising within the fact-framework of a specific and concretely real cognitive setting. In consequence, these concepts are such that their viability is linked indissolubly to the experienced realities of this actual world.

The role of common sense in facilitating the trust required for the effective management of human interactions has important implications for the way in which language works. For, as the preceding deliberations have emphasized, everyday discourse aims at safety and security. As a result, its contentions will, to be viable, generally be subject to implicit qualifications and reservations that relate to what happens *customarily* or *ordinarily* or *standardly* or *other things being equal* (*ceteris paribus*) or the like. We often say things like "humans can reason" or "birds can fly," realizing full well that the claim as it stands is inaccurate and imprecise, which is to say strictly incorrect. In ordinary life, to be sure, we get by with gearing our claims to how things run *normally* or *as a rule* because our interlocutors can in general supply the needed detail and fill in the gaps when matters stand in their accustomed place. Everyday-life generalizations

are secured against remote spoiling possibilities through the fact that we do not intend them to be taken rigorously and unrestrictedly, without being accorded any "benefit of qualification." As with the precept "Never say never," we do not want them to be construed with inflexible literalness.

The fact that everyday linguistic communication is geared to the ordinary course of things as we generally experience it means that our standard means for verbal communication are intimately geared to our common-sense view of the world and its ways. Linguistic standardism and common-sense thinking are opposite sides of one selfsame coin. Since everyday discourse aims at safety and security, its generalizations generally function in a standardistic, exception-permissive manner and its contentions accordingly call for a common-sensical construal. To achieve its ends our common discourse is—and must be—governed by common sense.

It is thus only a matter of common sense that people should understand the vocabulary they themselves employ in their verbal conversation: that they should know the meaning of the words they actually use. Even the radical sceptic who denies the availability of knowledge is not really to be conceived of as denying that he himself knows whatof he speaks—and thus, for example, fails to credit himself with knowing that "to know" does

not mean "to ride horseback." Rather his contention is that in the decidedly technical sense that he thinks the terms "to know" ought properly to bear, people don't really know what they claim to do.

The cognitive coordination of common sense clearly supports communication—and the reverse is true as well. The cultivation of objectivity is greatly facilitated by an interpersonal communication that enables one to test one's view of things against the views of other people. For one thing, objectivity is powerfully fostered through the creation of an intercommunicating community, seeing that effective intercommunication provides a crucial objectivity check. But even more importantly, objectivity is a pivotal function in the context of the community that we require for well-being and survival. We need to answer questions and make statements not only in such a way that they can be *understood* by others but also in such a way that they will be *accepted* by them.

The relation between objectivity and communication is thus a two-way street. Common-sense consensuality facilitates communication because by proceeding objectively, by doing as others would do, we render ourselves intelligible to them. Conversely, communication aids the pursuit of common-sense consensuality because information about what others are doing—and how and

why they do it—enables us to benefit from their efforts at understanding a common, shared world. Given that objectivity is a matter of interpersonal coordination (doing what others would in my place), communication with others is clearly both a facilitation of and an incentive to the impetus to cognitive coordination.

The cognitive coordination represented by the consensus of a shared common sense is a crucial aspect of that impetus towards objectivity that is an indispensable feature of our human *modus operandi*. For to pursue objectivity in practice means doing the best we can to ensure the rationality of our own proceedings—to seek to do what other reasonable people would do in our situation. And there is no more effectively practicable way to achieve this than by entering into a communicative commerce with them that enables us to determine through observation and study—and even interrogation—how other sensible people manage those affairs. We are well advised to do so not because we should wish to pursue consensus as such and desire to be conformist, but because we do (or should!) want to do what is the rational and appropriate thing. Here the considerations of rational economy that lie at the core of pragmatism once again come to the fore. For interpersonal communication, and impersonal objectivity with it, are part and parcel of rationality's concern for cost-effective means to

sensible ends. And common sense comes to play an altogether pivotal role here.[56]

7. Standardism and Presumption

In extracting information from the declarations of others we do—and must—rely on a whole host of working assumptions and presumptions. The pivotal factor here lies in the circumstance that verbal communication in informative contexts is governed by such conventions as:

- Speakers and writers purport their contentions to present the truth as they believe it to be. (This is why saying "The cat is on the mat and I don't believe it" is paradoxical.)
- Speakers and writers purport their contention to be formulated in a way that is accurate and not misleading.

Such conventions have a well-based rationale in considerations of communicative efficiency and effectiveness, since in their absence, communication would become at most impossible and at best vastly more cumbersome, Byzantine and problematic.

The coordination of common sense inherent in the standard communicative presumptions is an integral and indispensable component of this enterprise. For in all contexts of information

management, it is the usual—and appropriate—practice to operate on the principle of presuming what is standardly the case unless and until there are case-specific indications that matters stand otherwise. After all, in verbal communication we never have enough time and space at our disposal to do justice to it all: to explain every detail, and then to explain the further details relating to those explanations. And this means that for reasons of communicative efficiency and economy we have to let silence do some important communicative work. Since there is never time (or space) to say *everything*—to make explicit in practice everything that is relevant in principle, we have to operate on the natural presumption that what we do actually say is the most important part of the matter.

There is thus a general presumption that what is left unsaid does not abrogate or otherwise crucially alter that which it is only natural to infer from what is actually said. And this means that in many declarative settings silence implies *normalcy*. Suppose, for example, that Smith enters in and tells us that he saw a monkey at the construction site down the street. We would of course be surprised, realizing how unusual it is for this sort of primate to be at large in the town. But if on further discussion it turned out that Smith meant a pile driver with its falling hammer (also called a "monkey") we would feel misled and deceived. We would think

"If *that's* the sort of monkey he meant, he should have said so." Smith's silence about the sort of non-standard "monkey" at issue in his statement is meaningful because it authorizes the belief that it is an ordinary and familiar sort of monkey that is at issue.

It is a significant feature of normal communication that it is subject to a policy of not saying what does not really need to be said. That presumption of normalcy—that the relevant circumstances and conditions stand in their prosaically normal and natural condition unless otherwise indicated—is a crucial factor in communicative economy—an important communicative ground rule that authorizes all sorts of inferences *ex silentio*. This enables us to convey without explicit mention the fact of "business as usual" in the vast majority of circumstances where this is the case. In the absence of such a presumption it would become next-to-impossible to communicate efficiently. If I merely say "She gave birth to a child," you are on safe ground in concluding that it was a normal child and not, say, a pair of Siamese twins. To be sure, this conclusion "follows" not so much from what I said as from what I did not say. For either of these possible eventuations would have been so newsworthy, so contextually significant that there is every expectation that the speaker would have mentioned it, had it been the case.

Again, when we are discussing someone—say someone I know whom you are about to meet at a party—we operate with the tacit convention that I will tell you the relevantly pertinent facts, and that in those respects that I pass over in silence, the situation is ordinary and normal. But if he is a male who has lost a hand in battle, I would certainly be expected to make mention of it. But I need not trouble to tell you that the individual is made of flesh and bones. There is an operative presumption of normalcy in unmentioned respects that is an essential part of the rational economy of the process.

And presumptions of this sort hold not just with matters of fact but with matters of fiction as well. The story tells us that the villain ate a grape but tells us nothing further about that grape. Was it unripe or fully matured, pitted or pitless, Concord or Catawba? The story does not say. But this certainly does not mean that what the villain ate was a strangely anomalous grape—ontologically indeterminate in nature as between all of these possibilities and thus of a type we never encounter in the real world. The presumption of normalcy means that we are entitled to suppose that it was a perfectly ordinary grape—and not some biologically strange sort of grape about which our information is complete. Stories may be indeterminate

about things, but they are not about indeterminate things.

In grounding the truth about fictional things in what it is that the stories at issue say about them, one must be careful not to go too far. In his article on fictional objects, Terence Parsons has it that fictional objects are that of which all *and only* the sentences of the stories are true.[57] But this is deeply problematic. The Sherlock Holmes stories certainly do *not* tell us that Sherlock Holmes's paternal grandfather was not a chimpanzee. And so if *only* the Holmes-characterizing statements that are explicit in the stories are true, then this sentence would loose its claim to truth, expelling Holmes from the realm of ordinary humanity in a way that is clearly absurd. However, this situation is at once remedied by adopting the standard policy of communicative presumption that silence implies normalcy. Given that the Holmes stories are otherwise silent on the subject of grandfather Holmes, we are entitled to maintain that he, too, was an ordinary human being. For the context of telling us about things—be the setting one of real life or of fiction—the presumption is operative: If anything is out of the ordinary, the narrator would tell us about it.

It is part of the common sense that we impute to ourselves and credit to others that in providing and securing information in communicative

contexts, people should make those presumptions that allow our communicative business to be transacted smoothly and efficiently. The guiding principle here is that of cost-benefit considerations. The standard presumptions that underlie our communicative practices are emphatically *not* validatable as established facts. (For example, it is certainly *not* true—save at the level of statistical generality—that people say what they mean.) But their justification becomes straightforward on economic grounds, as practices that represent the most efficient and economical way to accomplish our communicative work.

Accordingly, our communicative proceedings are motivated by—and justified through—the essentially economic objective of extracting the maximum benefit from our information-oriented interactions. Specifically, they are governed by various operating principles along the following lines:

—to formulate your statements fully and carefully enough so as to avoid misunderstanding but not with so much detail and precision as to weary your auditors and get turned out.
—to make your message long (explicit, detailed, etc.) enough to convey your points but short enough to avert wasting everyone's time, effort, and patience; develop your message in the most informative way.
—to focus on what is most interesting and noteworthy and not to waste time with the obvious and trivial.

Communication thus proceeds on ground rules of communicative efficiency.[58] And those presumptions governing silence and normalcy play a pivotal role here through underwriting such principles as: "what is left out is unimportant for the issue at hand," "what is left out will not significantly alter the indications plausibly drawn from what is put in," and "what is left out would not call for a substantial revision of what has been said." Effective communication would become impracticable without those common-sensical presumptions that enable us to fill in the informative gaps between what is explicitly said. A common-sense policy of information management is critical for communication.

This page intentionally left blank

V

Science and Common Sense

1. Does Science Not Supercede Common Sense?

Does science not supercede common sense? Is not common sense wrong in ways that the more sophisticated knowledge of science ultimately brings to light? Did people in earlier, pre-Copernican times not see it as a matter of incontestable common-sense fact that the sun moves around the earth? And don't we now know better thanks to science?

The answer is negative throughout. Of course if common sense were "common knowledge"—simply matters of generally accepted belief—then science would indeed unravel it. But as we have seen time and again, this is not so, common sense being something quite different and distinctive. And there is nothing wrong with common-sense convictions in their commonsensical construal. Their very triviality—their standing apart from the realm of technical issues—is their unfailing safeguard.

Is common sense unscientific? Were this so, then, clearly, "too bad for common sense." For

science does, after all, represent our best and most refined efforts to achieve knowledge of the world's ways. But the long and short of it is that we do not need to trouble science about confirming those various individual truths of common sense—they are much too trivial for that; one does not need a steamroller to crack a nut. But we can indeed call upon science to look at common sense at large—at the wholesale rather than retail level, so to speak—and to explain at the physiological, psychological, and sociological levels:

- how it is that a creature such as Homo sapiens, emplaced in the world as we indeed are, should have effectively universal beliefs of the common-sense type.
- why it is that such beliefs will be substantially correct.

The generic need for and correctness of common-sensical beliefs, and their general correctness are matters that can use scientific substantiation. And there is every reason to think that this will indeed be forthcoming. For while common sense is pre- and perhaps even sub-scientific, the fact remains that our commitment to a manifold of beliefs of this nature is something that not only admits of and invites but will also doubtless secure the seal of scientific approbation.

After all, issues relating to matters of life-experience at large involve questions whose resolution requires no more than a rudimentary familiarity with the ways of the world—questions of the sort that an intelligent eight-year-old will be able to address on the basis of insights and information acquired at mother's knee. And it is, in fact, only the latter sort of rudimentary issues that can be counted as a matter of "common sense." Only here is there good reason to ascribe probative weight to those informed "common-sense" judgments of people-in-general.

But while common sense stands firm on its own ground, it has nothing but good to say about science. For when one is not oneself an expert, then it is "only a matter of common sense" to accept the consensus judgments of the relevant experts on any given issue—provided that such a consensus in fact exists. And it is only sensible that people should seek informed advice on such matters. Not, to be sure, because the experts are bound to be right. Far from it, we realize full well that they may very possibly not be, and that science often changes its mind on the issues. But, rather, we do so because we know that this is the best that we can rationally do—there being no other approach that affords us a better promise of success. Science has no quarrel with common sense because common sense knows better than to take issue with science.

It itself insists that scientific judgment should stand paramount in all matters that properly belong to science's domain.

Does science return the compliment? Would a sociological analysis of common-sense judgment give empirical substantiation to the fact of their on-the-whole reliability? It would be premature to answer "yes" because the requisite investigations have not as yet been carried out. (The claims of common sense are not a popular topic of research.) Yet it is difficult to believe that its outcome would be anything but positive. For, the very fact that something has come to figure within the prosaic realm of common sense is a powerful indicator of its cogency.

Still is the relationship really all that friendly? Do not science and common sense squarely disagree through offering us entirely different pictures of reality?

2. Eddington's Two Tables

In his classic work on *The Nature of the Physical World,*[59] the eminent British astronomer and astrophysicist Sir Arthur Eddington contemplated two tables:

> [Table No. 1] has been familiar to me from earliest years. It is a commonplace object of

that environment which I call the world. How shall I describe it? It has extension; it is comparatively permanent; it is coloured; above all it is . . . constituted of "substance" and by that word I am trying to convey to you some conception of its intrinsic nature. It is a *thing*; not like space, which is a mere negation; not like time, which is —Heaven knows what! . . . After all if you are a plain commonsense man, not too much worried with scientific scruples, you will be confident that you understand that nature of an ordinary table.

Table No. 2 is my scientific table. It is a more recent acquaintance and I do not feel so familiar with it. . . . My scientific table is mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed; but their combined bulk amounts to less than a billionth of the bulk of the table itself. . . . There is nothing *substantial* about my second table. It is nearly all empty space—space pervaded, it is true, by fields of force, but these are assigned to the category of "influences", not of "things". Even in the minute part which is not empty we must not transfer the old notion of substance. In dissecting matter into electric charges we have traveled far from that picture of it which first gave rise to the conception of substance.

This passage of Eddington's very popular book echoes through a good deal of twentieth-century philosophizing about the relation between scientific knowledge and the commonplace knowledge of everyday life, and we can hear its resonances in such latter-day philosophical contrasts as "real vs. stone age physics," "scientific vs. folk psychology," and "the manifest vs. the scientific image" of the world's furnishings. It is a passage that well deserves further reflection.

When contemplating the contrast between the table of what Eddington calls "the plain commonsense man" and that of what he calls "the scientist's table"—between the commonplace table of the phenomenology of everyday experience and the sophisticated table of scientific revisionism—the first question that arises is: How many tables are there, none or one or two or many? And are all the tables real or only one of them—and if so which?

The rational economy of Occam's Razor ("Do not multiply entities beyond necessity") and the dictates of plain common sense combine to indicate that there is but one table. So the appropriate answer here is—and has to be—that there is a single table, and what is at issue is merely a matter of two different ways of looking at it, two different perspectives, so to speak—the one sensory and commonsensical, the other theoretical

and scientific. What is at issue are two different conceptual perspectives involving two different modes of description and two different sets of explanatory principles. The perspectival difference at issue is substantially analogous to the perspectival difference at issue when one and the same landscape is described by the agriculturist, the landscape painter, and the military engineer. The concept-contexts at issue envision different questions—different ranges of interest and concern, the one informal and pre- or sub-scientific, the other technical and scientifically sophisticated. Different things need to be said on these two sides because distinctly different ranges of concern are at issue.

The next question that arises is: how are these two Eddingtonian perspectives related?

The first thing to note here is that we must distinguish between *identificatory* issues and issues of *causal* operation—between the issues of *what* and *whence*. From the angle of identification, the plain man's work-a-day table is basic—we could not even specify the scientist's table—could not identify what is at issue—if we did not already have the plain man's table at our disposition. With only the resources of theoretical physics at one's disposal one cannot get there from here. Quite in general, there is no way to identify (to specify or indicate) a phenomenologically conceived object like a table without taking the step—the leap if

you will—into the realm of phenomenal objects as such. If all that is available to you for the purposes of description and identification is the language and concepts of microphysics, then you can never get there from here—can never reach the level of consideration at which those everyday-life macro-objects function. On the other hand, in the order of causal considerations it is the scientific way of regarding—or, rather, disregarding—the table that is going to be basic. If our interest bears on patterns relating to world's causal commerce—including how it features in our sensory perception—then it is the perspective of science that is going to be paramount.

But how does this perspectival difference function when the focus is on the cognitive issue of our knowledge regarding the table? What is its rationale and reason for being? Why should there be such a substantial change of perspective between science and common sense?

3. The Security/Indefiniteness Tradeoff and the Contrast between Seience and Common Sense

Getting a good grip on the contrast between the world-view of science and that of common sense requires a recourse to some epistemic fundamentals.

In contrasting science and common sense the French physicist Pierre Duhem wrote:

> Just as the laws of common sense [Duhem offers "All men are mortal" as an example] are based on the observation of facts by means natural to man, so the laws of physics are based on the results of physical experiments. . . . [But] it is theoretical interpretation that permits scientific experiments to penetrate much further than common sense into the detailed analysis of phenomena.[60]

It is, however, exactly this admixture of theorizing that renders science more problematic and less secure than common sense.

It is a basic principle of epistemology that increased confidence in the correctness of our estimates can always be purchased at the price of decreased accuracy. We *estimate* the height of the tree at around 25 feet. We are *quite sure* that the tree is 25±5 feet. We are *virtually certain* that its height is 25±10 feet. But we are *completely and absolutely sure* that its height is between 1 inch and 100 yards. Of this we are completely sure, in the sense that we deem it absolutely certain, secure beyond the shadow of a doubt, as certain as we can be of anything in the world, so sure that we would be willing to stake our life on it, and the

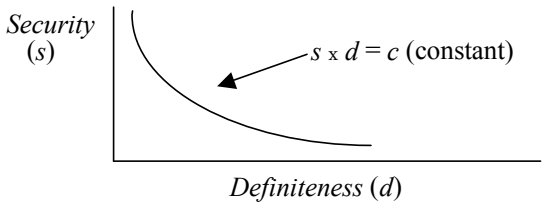
like. With any sort of estimate, there is always a characteristic trade-off relationship between the evidential *security* of the estimate on the one hand (as determinable on the basis of its probability or degree of acceptability), and the informative *definiteness* (exactness, detail, precision, etc.) of its asserted content on the other. Vaguer and looser statements are for that very reason more secure because they embody larger margins of error. The relationship at issue here was first clearly noted by Duhem: "There is a sort of balance between precision and certainty: one cannot be increased except to the detriment of the other."[61]

This complementarity relationship between security and definiteness is graphically characterized by a curve of the general form of an equilateral hyperbola. (See Display 1.)

Given this fact that the increased vulnerability and diminished security of our claims is the undetachable other side of the coin of the pursuit of definiteness, it becomes clear that science operates in the lower right-hand sector of the figure. Its cultivation of informativeness (definiteness of information) entails the risk of error in science: its claims are subject to great insecurity. No doubt, the progress of science makes it possible to decrease somewhat the value of that curve-characterizing constant *c*, but the fundamental trade-off relationship remains unavoidable. An information-theo-

retic uncertainty principle prevents our obtaining the sort of information we would ideally like.[62]

Display 1
Duhem's Principle
The Security/Definiteness Relationship



Note: The overall quality of the information provided by a claim hinges on combining its security with its definiteness. Given suitable ways of measuring security (*s*) and definiteness (*d*), the curve at issue can be supposed to be an equilateral hyperbola obtained with *s* x *d* as constant.

The reality of it is that the exactness and universality of technical claims at the cutting-edge frontier of science makes them comparatively vulnerable, notwithstanding our most elaborate efforts at their testing and substantiation. Science declares not merely that roughly such-and-such generally occurs in certain loosely defined sorts of circumstances, but exactly what happens in exactly what conditions. In science we always aim at the

maximum of universality, precision, and exactness. In making the scientific assertion, "The melting point of lead is 327.7 degrees Celsius," we mean to assert that *all* pieces of (pure) lead will unfailingly melt at *exactly* this temperature. We certainly do not mean to assert that most pieces of (pure) lead will *probably* melt at *somewhere around* this temperature. (And in this regard, there would be a potential problem, should it turn out, for example, that there is no melting point at all and that what is actually at issue is the center of a statistical distribution.) The theoretical claims of science involve no hedging, no fuzziness, no incompleteness, and no exceptions; they are strict: precise, wholly explicit, exceptionless, and unshaded.

By contrast, when we assert in ordinary life that "peaches are delicious," we are asserting something like "most people will find the eating of suitably grown and duly matured peaches a rather pleasurable experience." Such a statement has all sorts of built-in safeguards on the order of "more or less," "in ordinary circumstances," "by and large," "normally," "when all things are equal," "rather plausible," and so on. They are not really laws but rules of thumb, a matter of practical lore rather than scientific rigor. But this enables them to achieve great security. For there is safety in vagueness: a factual claim can always acquire security through inexactness. Take "there

are rocks in the world" or "dogs can bark." It is virtually absurd to characterize such everyday-life contentions as fallible. Their security lies in their indefiniteness or looseness—it is unrealistic and perverse to characterize such common-life claims as "defeasible." Such contentions say so little that it is "unthinkable" that they can be overthrown. So in this regard it is illuminating to take account of the following remark by C. S. Peirce:

> The most important [shortcoming of the Scottish doctrine of common sense] is that those philosophers failed to remark the extreme vagueness of *indubitable* beliefs. For example, everybody's actions show that it is impossible to doubt there is an element of order in the world; but the moment we attempt [specifically] to define orderliness we find room for doubt.[63]

But if the Scottish doctrine failed in this regard it was a *felix culpa*—a fortunate error. For it is precisely in the vagueness of those common sensical beliefs that their security resides. And this is no accident. For the cultivation of trustworthiness is crucial to the effective conduct of human affairs.

And so, the security/definiteness relationship has substantial implications for the *modus operandi* of inquiry in philosophy as elsewhere. And one of

its fundamental implications is represented by the following observation:

Thesis 1: ***Insofar as our thinking is vague, truth is accessible even in the face of error.***

Consider the situation where you correctly accept *P*-or-*Q*. But—so let it be supposed—the truth of this disjunction roots entirely in that of *P*, whereas *Q* is quite false. However, you accept *P*-or-*Q* only because you are convinced of the truth of *Q*; it so happens that *P* is something you actually disbelieve. Yet despite your error, your belief is entirely true.[64] Consider a concrete instance. You believe that Smith bought some furniture because he bought a table. However it was, in fact, a chair that he bought, something you would flatly reject. Nevertheless, your belief that he bought some furniture is unquestionably correct. The error in which you are involved, although real, is not so grave as to destabilize the truth of your belief.

Ignorance is reflected in an inability to answer questions cogently. But one has to be careful in this regard. Answering a question informatively is not just a matter of offering a *correct* answer but also a matter of offering an *exact* answer. Thus consider the question "What is the population of Shanghai?" If I respond "More than ten and less than ten billion," I have provided a *correct* answer, albeit perhaps one that is not particularly helpful.

So the irony of it is that, insofar as our ignorance of relevant matters leads us to be vague in our judgments, we may well manage to enhance the likelihood of being right. The fact of the matter is that we have:

Thesis 2: ***By constraining us to make vaguer judgments, ignorance enhances our access to correct information (albeit at the cost of less detail and precision).***

Thus, if I have forgotten that Seattle is in Washington State, then if "forced to guess," I might well erroneously locate it in Oregon. Nevertheless, my vague judgment that "Seattle is located in the Northwestern U.S." is quite correct. This state of affairs means that when the truth of our claims is critical, we generally "play it safe" and make our commitments less definite and detailed.

Consider, for example, so simple and colloquial a statement as "The servant declared that he could no longer do his master's bidding." This statement is pervaded by a magisterial vagueness. It conveys very little about what went on in the exchange between servant and master. We are told virtually nothing about what either of them actually said. What the object of their discussion was, what form of words they used, the manner of their discourse (Did the master order or request? Was the servant speaking from rueful incapacity or from belliger-

ent defiance?) all these are questions we cannot begin to answer. Even the relationship at issue, whether owner/slave or employer/ employee, is left in obscurity. In sum, there is a vast range of indeterminacy here—a great multitude of very different scenarios would fit perfectly well the description of events which that individual statement puts before us. And this vagueness clearly provides a protective shell to guard that statement against a charge of falsity. Irrespective of how matters might actually stand within a vast range of alternative circumstances and conditions, the statement remains secure, its truth unaffected by which possibility is realized. And in practical matters in particular, such rough guidance is often altogether enough. We need not know exactly how much rain there will be to make it sensible for us to take an umbrella.

Be this as it may, in point of reliability and truth it is a key feature of common sense that it is vague and imprecise. But it is, in fact, just this deficiency that provides for its advantage over matter involving expertise in point of security and stability.

4. Different Spheres of Communication

It is—or should be—clear that different priorities will obtain in different contexts of communication. In everyday-life communication, where we

are deeply concerned to protect our credibility and trustworthiness, we value security over informativeness. Here looseness and imprecision are perfectly acceptable. In science, on the other hand, we value generality and precision over security. Here we seek exactness and precision: we want to know how all objects of exactly this or that sort always behave. After all, natural science cannot rest content with theses like, "On the whole, larger objects are heavier," or "Most things made predominantly of lead generally melt at temperatures around 330 degrees Celsius." Generality, precision, and detail are at a premium in scientific matters, and so in scientific discourse we prioritize these factors in a way that makes our scientific theories vulnerable. We deliberately court risk by aiming at maximal definiteness, and thus at maximal informativeness and testability. Aristotle's view that science deals *with* what happens for the most part—ordinarily and "in the general course of things" has long ago been left by the wayside. The theories of modern natural science take no notice of what happens usually or normally; they seek to transact their explanatory business in terms of strict universality—in terms of what happens always and everywhere and in all circumstances. And in consequence we have no choice but to accept the vulnerability of our scientific statements relative to the operation of the security/definiteness trade-off.

It is of the nature of technical natural science, as its practitioners actually pursue it at the research frontier, to state how things stand exactly and how they go always and everywhere—in full generality and precise detail. Technical science foreswears any "loose talk" at the level of vague generality or analogy or approximation. It has no use for qualifiers such as "usually" or "roughly." Universality and exactness are its touchstones. This circumstance renders the claims of science vulnerable—vulnerability being the price that we pay for generality and precision. We know that none of the hard claims of present-day frontier natural science will move down the corridors of time untouched. Fragility is the price that we pay in science for the sake of generality and precision. (The half-life of theories in frontier physics is relatively short.)

The situation in science with its instance on generality and precision is accordingly strikingly different from that which prevails in everyday life. And this accords smoothly with the needs of the situation. For ordinary-life communication is a practically oriented endeavor carried on in a social context. It stresses such maxims as: "Aim for security, even at the price of definiteness; protect your credibility; avoid misleading people." Here, in ordinary life, the preservation of credibility is paramount, one wants to formulate one's claims

in as safe and secure a way as possible, and thus one resorts to vagueness and imprecision.

After all, the aims of ordinary-life discourse are primarily practical, largely geared to social interaction and the coordination of human effort in communal enterprises that serve a common interest. In this context, it is crucial that we aim at credibility and acceptance—that we establish and maintain a good reputation for reliability and trustworthiness. In the framework of common-life discourse, we thus take our stance at a point far removed from that of science. In science, on the other hand, if creativity and originality are paramount, then one would put one's claims in the most ambitious and surprising way, accepting the risks inherent in universality, precision, and the like. Very different probative orientations prevail in the two areas. In everyday contexts, our approach is one of situational satisficing: we stop at the first level of sophistication and complexity that suffices for our present needs. In science, however, our objectives are primarily theoretical and governed by the aims of disinterested inquiry so that the claims of informativeness—of generality, exactness, and precision—are paramount. Plausibly enough, the appropriateness of an epistemic policy hinges upon the nature of the governing desideratum (credibility vs. creativity).

In science, we accept greater risks willingly because we ask much more of the project. We deliberately court risk by aiming at maximal definiteness and thus at maximal informativeness and testability. Aristotle's view that terrestrial science deals with what happens ordinarily and in the normal course of things has long ago been left by the wayside. The theories of modern natural science has little interest in what happens generally or by and large; they seek to transact their explanatory business in terms of strict universality, in terms of what happens always and everywhere and in all kinds of circumstances. And in consequence we have no choice but to acknowledge the vulnerability of our scientific statements, subject to the operation of the security-definiteness trade-off.

However, the ground rules of ordinary-life discourse are altogether different from those of natural science. Ordinary-life communication is a practically oriented endeavor geared to social interaction and the coordination of human effort in communal enterprises for the common good. The operative injunctions here are: "Aim for security, even at the price of definiteness; do not lay yourself open to the reproach of purveying mistaken information. Avoid misleading people into error. Preserve your credibility!" In ordinary life we operate at the upper left-hand side of page 139's Display. The situation contrasts sharply

with that of science, whose objectives are largely theoretical, and where the name of the game is disinterested inquiry.

It thus emerges that very different probative orientations prevail in the two areas. In everyday-life contexts, our approach is one of situational satisficing: we stop at the lowest level of sophistication and complexity that suffices for our immediate needs. After all, our proceedings are in general subject to a principle of economy of effort and in practical matters we do not want to expend more effort than the circumstances of the situation require. In science, however, where the purely theoretical interests of informativeness are paramount, our approach is one of systemic maximizing: we press on towards the ideals of systemic completeness and comprehensiveness. Here we put ourselves at greater risk because we ask more of the project.

Accordingly, in this contrast between scientific knowledge and the knowledge of common sense, science wins out in point of precision and detail, but common sense wins out in point of security. At the level of scientific generality and precision we have incorrigibly certain and invulnerable information, while at the level of common sense we get no detailed understanding. As the aims of the enterprises are characteristically different, our inquiries in everyday life and in science have

a wholly different aspect and purport, with the former achieving stability and security at the price of sacrificing definiteness, a price which the latter scorns to pay.

For while our ordinary, commonsensical concepts such as "table" or "tree" and "rock" are useful enough in their way, facilitating the coordination of practical activities, nevertheless they lack the precision required for satisfactory explanations. And yet, in seeking this precision, science courts error; the claims of the state-of-the-art in science at any particular time doubtless need eventual revision and correction. To characterize reality adequately, we need theses that are both relatively secure and relatively precise. And yet we are caught betwixt and between. From the angle of precision, frontier science is in good shape, but from the angle of truth its condition is rather problematic. Common sense, on the other hand, stands on firmer ground in relation to security, but is so untidy conceptually that it lacks the precision required by detailed informativeness.

A possible misapprehension arises in this connection. A contention along the following lines is very tempting: "Science is the best, most thoroughly tested knowledge we have—the 'knowledge' of everyday life pales by comparison. The theses of science are really secure and well-established, those of everyday life casual and fragile." But in fact the

very reverse is the case: our scientific theories are vulnerable and have a shortish lifespan; it is our claims at the looser level of ordinary life that are very secure and stable.

But of course untutored opinion too has its problems. One region in which common "knowledge" is often held to be systematically at odds with science lies in the realm of probability. Most striking here is the phenomenon of "it's about due" thinking that occurs (for example) with people's inclination to think that if a coin toss has resulted in a long series of heads, then on the next toss a tail is more likely than a head. But what goes wrong here is not so much an error in reasoning as a mistaken factual supposition based on assimilating the situation here to the much more familiar situation of saturation phenomena. After all, most of the trends we have to contend with in life ultimately run out of steam.

A good case can thus be made out for holding that here those "incompetent" individuals are not in fact deficient in their ability to reason probabilistically. Rather they simply (and often quite understandably) adopt a series of substantive (material) assumptions different from those that investigators are minded to employ.[65] What is at issue are differences in beliefs as to matters of fact and not differences in inferential procedure. And this sort of thing holds good for most of the

examples adduced by Kahneman and Twersky and their followers to argue that people are irrational or incompetent on matters of probabilistic reasoning.

To be sure, we pay a price here because the everyday "knowledge" of ordinary-life affairs so functions that its concepts are loose, fuzzy, general. Its world is populated with things such as trees, rocks, gasses and all those conceptions of a rudimentary "knowledge" that we deem too loose and imprecise for the purposes of explanatory understanding. The adequacy of this sort of knowledge in point of accuracy (rather than security) is something that science has undermined for good and all. The scientific project itself teaches us that the concepts of everyday life are too vague and loose to provide for an adequate explanatory basis regarding the phenomena of nature—seeing that it was the unsatisfying character of the "stone-age physics" of untutored experience that drove us to develop science in the first place.

If we are going to rest content with a certain sort of epistemic minimalism—a view of things which, in discounting exactness, puts a minimal premium on the precision of scientific detail—then we will have the ordinary everyday-life perspective of their nature and *modus operandi*. Here we effectively throw the sophistication of detailed explanatory informativeness to the winds, adopting the stance

of a self-denying ordinance of sorts that suppresses our scientific knowledge of things. This is the position that is occupied by Eddington's "plain commonsense man." On the other hand, if it is a more sophisticated level of explanatory informativeness that we want, then we abandon that plain man's stance as simply too crude to be useful and arrive at the table as seen by Eddington's *homo scientificus*. Explanatory detail is now paramount and the epistemic situation becomes radically different.

And so it is clear that the rationale for the perspectival difference between Eddington's two tables roots in the fact that entirely different contexts of consideration are at issue in the spheres of science and common sense. The divergence of views ultimately rests on the orientation of our interest as reflected in the teleology of the different enterprises involved.

5. Science and Direct Realism

And so it also becomes clear why it is that the common-sense view of the world is strongly resistant to the extraction of metaphysical implications. For since the aim of metaphysics is also to achieve clarity and precision in our understanding the ways of the world in their relation to human concerns, those truisms of common sense able to achieve a high standing on the security scale are

too general and imprecise to achieve the necessary clarity required for philosophical purposes.

Thomas Reid and the Scottish common-sense philosophers were radical empiricists in their belief that the truths of experience are the limits of our knowledge so that the phenomena of experience are epistemic ultimates that cannot themselves be explained in terms of further sub- or trans- experiential facts that we know. With them, the world of common sense bases as determined by experience is all we ever actually *know*—and everything beyond it is mere conjecture, hypothesis, and supposition. With respect to factual knowledge, observation and its rigorously inductive generalization is all we have—whatever science (let alone metaphysics) purports beyond this limited range is the work not of cognition proper but of the imagination.[66] The underlying productive causes of the experiential phenomena lie outside our finite ken.

For Reid and the common-sense realists it is the plain man's table of everyday observation that alone is knowable and real. We thus see objects as they are because what we perceive of them is all there is to them. To be sure, our perceivings are the result of causal processes. But those processes are diffuse beyond the realm of individuation; they do not constitute or define objects. There are no "things in themselves" outside of perception. Thus, as those Scottish thinkers saw it, the causality of

nature is inscrutable. Accordingly, the Scotsmen espoused a sensory realism according to which things are what appropriate (i.e., non-illusional and non-delusional) perception indicates them to be. Those observed properties of theirs are their real properties—they have no others. The only objects for us are those that figure in our experience. And these are by nature experiential objects—objects as constituted and defined in experience. The distinction between the real and the (delusional or illusional) unreal is a distinction to be drawn within the phenomenology of experience, and not a distinction between experience and something outside of it. Phenomenally experiential objecthood is the only kind there is. And so, even as Eddington's scientist relegated the phenomenal table to the domain of illusion, so the Scotsmen dismissed the scientists' table as a figment of theorizing.

But of course this sort of thing is carrying one's commitment to common sense too far. That the resources of common sense provide us with an access way to knowledge is true enough, but that it provides our *only* access way is deeply problematic. No cognitive resource—common sense included—can make good claims to exclusivity, none can establish the unresistance of other pathways to knowledge. Common sense is no substitute

for scientific or metaphysical expertise, and it is no excluder of it either.

The fundamental fact here is that our only possible accessing to "how the world really is" is via the statements about the world that we accept as true. And this effectively means that we accept *both* science *and* common sense. A doctrine of common sense that cannot reconcile itself to science and indeed even to metaphysics would be a doctrine not worth having.

Nor yet is science our only pathway to authentic knowledge of the real. The Scottish common-sense philosophers were so fearful that the world-picture produced by the theorizing of knowledge of science and philosophy might disestablish common sense that they felt impelled to the preemptive course of disestablishing it. They were prepared, nay eager, to abandon Eddington's second table. But this sort of thing is of course deeply problematic if not altogether inappropriate.

For of course what the adherent of common sense need not—and indeed cannot deny—is that when we see an apple there is indeed a causal story to be told: that while (by hypothesis) we indeed see an apple (and only the apple and not its image, idea, representation, physical basis) this overall state of affairs is something that occurs only and inevitably as the result of a suitable array of causal processes. There is, in sum, no conflict or

contradiction between a direct account of perception at the phenomenological level and the causal account of perception at the physico-physiological level. Such accounts construe and supplement one another rather than conflict. And common sense need pick no quarrel with science in this regard. The proper claims of common sense are claims to validity and not claims to exclusivity.

And so while both science and common sense provide us with instructive and acceptable representations of reality, they do so at very different levels of detail and precision proceeding in rather different ways and with decidedly different ends in view. And even as a geographic configuration—a city, say—looks very different on an inch-per-mile scale and on a inch-per-100-mile scale, so is this the case with the view of reality that we get at different positions of the security/definitiveness curve. And so while both science and common sense depict a common terrain—the world we live in and its furnishings—they do this in so different a manner that to all appearance—to all visible intents and purposes they might as well be dealing with different terrains.

It should be noted that such a perspectival approach to the issue of science and common sense enables us to understand the relationship between these two enterprises from three angles.

(1) From the point of view of science itself, it means that the common-sense view of the world is defective because it is uninformatively fuzzy, vague, and imprecise.
(2) From the point of view of common sense, it means that the approach of science is deficient because it misses the point and changes the subject, becoming irrelevant because the objects of common-sense concern are effectively invisible at the level of detail and process at which science operates.

And finally also

(3) From the philosophical—that is to say synoptic and overarchingly Olympian point of view—it emerges that both of the preceding perspectives are limited because each sees the issue in a way that is partial and incomplete in putting the other aside.

6. Schoolbook Science

There is, however, a possible compromise position—a halfway house—in the divergence and disparity between the perspective of common life and that of technical science. This is provided by what may be characterized as "schoolbook science," which is able to provide a realism of the middle range—the realism of the elementary science of popularizations and the sorts of expository texts used for instructional purposes in school.

Are there atoms? Is the atomic theory true? It all depends. It is a matter of just what the "atomic theory" is—just exactly what it is to be taken to assert.

Taken at face value, "the atomic theory" that we now have is surely problematic. After all, *exactly* what are atoms like? Neither Rutherford, nor Bohr, nor Weinberg-Salam, nor the nuclear physics of today provide an ultimate definitively *correct* picture of the atom. We clearly cannot trust the science of the day to the extent of saying that we know just exactly what atoms are like. Nevertheless, atoms at large (or better, "at loose") are altogether safe. There is no danger that atoms and molecules—broadly understood—will cease to play a role in physics and chemistry. Even though we shall doubtless have to revise our conceptions of them, these items as such will not go away.

The looser and detail-suppressive knowledge of popularized science—indebted though it is to technical science—is not itself scientific knowledge. Technical science scorns imprecision and operates at the outer limits of exactness and accuracy. It would not stoop to say the sorts of detail-ignoring things we find in science reporting or in introductory accounts for laymen. But it is just this sort of popularized "schoolbook science" that is the focus of our confident assurance that we know how things stand in the world.

One recent writer poses the following worry. Recent science abandons the luminiferous aether. What if future science did the same with the electron?

> Then we will have to say electrons do not really exist. What if this keeps happening? What if all the theoretical entities postulated by one generation (molecules, genes, etc., as well as electrons) invariably do not exist from the standpoint of later science?[67]

But this worry is simply another instance of the "what if" thinking of traditional scepticism. ("What if life were a dream?") Such hand-wringing, abandoning electrons, molecules, and genes (which, after all, we can "observe" with contemporary technology) is hyperbolic. We can—and doubtless, will—come to think these things very *differently* from the way in which we conceptualize them today. But given the conceptual plasticity and flexibility of what is at issue with "electrons," "genes," etc., the prospect of their total disappearance is on the same level as the total disappearance of Julius Caesar. It is not that this is something *logically* impossible. It is simply that this is one of these unrealistic possibilities that need not worry us. For in succumbing to this sort of worry, we leave the issue of science behind and plunge into

the generalized scepticism of far-fetched "what-if speculation."

Moreover, the argument of the preceding passage has another defect when seen as an objection to scientific realism. Admittedly, scientific entities can become dislodged—Priestley's phlogiston moved aside to make room for Lavoisier's oxygen, the "gravitational attraction" of Newton gave way to the space-warp of Einstein, radiation succumbed to fields and ceased to be a matter of waves-in-a-medium, thereby abolishing the luminiferous aether. But the disappearance of *some* "scientific entities" never leaves a vacuum. Rather, they are *replaced*: it takes one to dislodge one. And so the preceding "argument from error" is not an argument against scientific realism, but simply one against the ontological finality of science as we have it. At first, people thought that man's proto-ancestor was akin to a gorilla, then the baboon came into favor, only to be displaced eventually by the chimpanzee. But such a series of changes does not support the induction that man has no ancestor at all—and indeed at the vague level of "ape-like" creatures all was and remains well. Similarly, we cannot, in the case of science, construe the historical sequence of changes of mind about theoretical entities as providing an argument against the reality of theoretical entities at large—provided that

we are prepared to construe them in a sufficiently loose manner.

It is, of course, undeniable that what we generally call "our knowledge of the world" rests on the findings of science. But this knowledge for the most part does so by taking the hard scientific information of the day and "loosening it up" by removing all that fine-grained detail. We constantly get more information of high security, albeit information that is loose and imprecise. With "the growth of our scientific knowledge" (vulnerable though it is!), there is an ever-increasing number of things we can claim with high confidence, provided whenever we are willing "to fuzz matters up a bit."

And so while the claims of our technical science will doubtless require eventual correction at the level of detail and precision at which they are cast, nevertheless the overall picture that emerges from science is doubtless right in its rough outlines. An increasingly adequate picture of nature emerges not *in* technical science, but *through* technical science. We realize that we have to be prepared to revise any and every thesis of "hard" science—that none of its present day frontier theories will survive unscathed to the year 5,000—wholly without revision. But this is not the case with the grosser materials of schoolbook science. (Atoms of some sort will be with us from here on in.)

To be sure, schoolbook science not only claims that there are atoms, magnetic fields, and genes, but obviously also involves some claims about *what* they are like. Yet they are only rather rough and inexact claims. Unlike substantive science—an aggregate of detailed theories—it involves no commitment to the precise details of any particular theory whatsoever. A realism of schoolbook science opens up the clearly plausible prospect of being realistic about the theoretical entities of science (holding they indeed are real) without being overly realistic about the current theories of science (holding they are actually true and give a *correct* account of reality).

And the point of view sketched here with respect to physics holds elsewhere as well. Take psychology. As far as the philosophy of brain processes is concerned, there is potentially no single state of things as a "headache", and no kind of specific condition of affairs that can be characterized a "feeling of discomfort." The complex causality of things links a wide variety of specific conditions, treating them in such a vague and indefinite way that it takes a vast amount of sophisticated disentangling. But it is just this sort of vagueness that renders unproblematically true and tenable the claim of "folk psychology" that it is uncomfortable and distressing to have headaches. All sorts of sophisticated and complex concepts and theories

in the scientific psychology of the day can be mistaken without doing the least damage to the informalized psychological facts of everyday life. When Spinoza wrote in Book III of the *Ethics* that "He who imagines that what he hates is destroyed will rejoice," he articulated a thesis that is about as safe and secure as anything that belonged to the science of his day—or of ours.

This approach puts us in the fortunate position of being able to hold that the objects discussed in our scientific theories have a life independent of those theories and do not stand or fall by their correctness.[68] It is precisely our acknowledgment of the looseness of schoolbook-style knowledge about atoms and molecules that renders the existence of such things secure. If the existence of an item of scientific concern were a matter of "to be is to be (exactly) as we now deem it to be"—then its existence would stand on very shaky ground indeed.

The loosened-up "popularization" of science at issue in schoolbook science is, of course, something far removed from pre-scientific "common sense." It is generically "scientific"—indebted to technical science and undergirded by it. But it is insufficiently precise and therefore insufficiently deep—unable to answer adequately to our demands for a detailed understanding how things work in the world. (That is just what marks it as

"popular" rather than "real" science.) All the same, it gains its crucial advantage of security precisely because of its looseness. It achieves that middle ground of concurrent security and informativeness that is essential to any viable sort of halfway house between technical science and the common sense of everyday life.

In sum, the only scientific table to which Eddington is really entitled is that of schoolbook science, which is actually as it should be. For it was just that sort of thing that he was in fact engaged in writing.

This page intentionally left blank

VI

Universality and Common Sense in Moral Matters

1. The Problem of Moral Relativissm

The preceding considerations regarding the utility of common sense in matters of cognition also extend into the ethical domain. One good way to see how this comes about is afforded by the problem of relativism.

The thesis of "moral relativism" runs roughly as follows:

> People in different places, times, and cultures each have their own position on moral matters. So while "internally" to such a doctrinal position—there is a place for right and wrong, nevertheless "externally"—when an entire doctrine is itself under consideration—matters stand differently. Nothing is really right or wrong as such—it is all relative. Different people and different cultures hold different views about such matters: what is right for one is wrong for another. In morals as in manners, *autres lieux, autres moeurs*. There are no absolute moral standards binding on all men in all times and cultures, in moral

> matters there is no prospect of unqualified correctness or error. Any and every group is entitled to its own opinion. Since all different views are equally "valid", the ideas of validity or correctness, strictly speaking, simply do not apply in matters of morality.

On such a view, as Pascal observed regarding different conceptions of justice, "What is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other."[69] And this sort of moral relativism is widely maintained—and nowadays all too often simply assumed as self-evident. In fact, however, it is deeply problematic because, after all, the cogency of moral judgments is something that can and should be viewed in a very different light. After all, as the great majority of moralists and moral philosophers have always insisted, one must reckon with the universality and unrestricted validity of moral claims. Alike friends and foes of moral cogency have ongoingly maintained that if morality dissolves into a chaos of variable customs and conflicting opinions, its claims to legitimacy are thereby annihilated and its capacity to make rationally appropriate demands upon us are abolished in a remorseless slide into a moral nihilism where anything goes, with local custom alone as limit. Morality then dissolves, and nothing remains but mores. But this simply does

not come to terms with the reality of the situation. To see this let us go back to basics.

2. The Rationale of Moral Absolutes

Suppose that some tribe or culture maintains that "It is quite acceptable to hurt another's feelings simply to suit your own convenience" or "It is a good thing to tell falsehoods in order to further your own advancement." Then it is at once clear that they just don't have a clue what morality is all about. For however common or even customary that sort of thing may be among them (or us!), it simply is not morally acceptable on the one and only standard of morality there is—that of absolute morality.[70]

Of course, different people in different places and times appear to conduct their "moral" affairs very differently. Nevertheless, at the level of basics, of first fundamentals, there indeed is uniformity and universality "all across the board" where morality as such is concerned. For what all modes of morality have in common is just exactly this—that (by hypothesis) they all qualify as "modes of morality" under *our* conception of the matter. And this circumstance constrains various moral principles and values in a once-and-for-all manner.

A "questioner's prerogative" prevails. In the setting of our inquiries it is our own use of language

that is determinative for our deliberations. When *our* questions are at issue, it is they themselves that set the terms of reference. An alien culture may well have no morality at all, but it cannot have one that differs from ours in its fundamentals with respect to the issues involved. And this is so simply because differing in the fundamental respects that define our conception of the matter means that whatever is at issue is not and cannot be morality as we (who are conducting this discussion) understand the term.

Consider an analogy. There are many sorts of blades for knives. But the fundamental principle that knives have blades does not at all depend on how people choose to go about making knives; it inheres in *our conception* of what a "knife" is. If certain objects lack blades, then they just are not *knives*, whatever society may be the venue of their production. The bladedness of knives is not a matter of transcultural invariance but rather one of local cultural determination: what matters when we discuss knives is determined by what is at issue with "knives" as we (in our culture) construe and consider them. A locution like "The *X*'s have a different conception of morality from ourselves" makes about as much sense as "The *X*'s have a different conception of knives from ourselves." Of course, they may think of the objects that we describe as "knives" in a very different way—say

as light-reflectors for signaling. But that simply means they have no conception of *knives* at all.[71] And the same sort of thing goes for morality as well. If someone thinks that random violence is "morally" acceptable, it is improbable to the point of infeasibility that he understands what morality is.

While the actions seen as acceptable and even the *criteria* of moral acceptability vary across times and cultures, the determinative *principles* that are constitutive of morality cannot. However, this interesting circumstance does not so much reflect a fact about different times and cultures as the fact that what *counts* as a "principle of morality" at all is something that lies with us, through the fact that we are the ultimate arbiters of what "morality" is all about in the setting of our own discussions and deliberations on the topic.

Admittedly, the Roman ideal of *manliness* or the Renaissance ideal of *virtue* did not give pride of place to moral virtues. But that does not mean that the contemporaries of Cicero or of Machiavelli had a different *morality* from ourselves; it simply means that they systematically subordinated morality *per se* to other values—a step which is in the final analysis not *morally* defensible, whatever can be said for it on other grounds. No matter how strongly communal custom may endorse and normalize certain practices (e.g., maltreatment of prisoners

of war), they are not *morally* acceptable (any more than customary acceptance renders certain foods nourishing or certain practices healthy).

With "What is moral?" at the level of concrete actions there is substantial room for variation and pluralism. But this will be so neither with "What is morality?" nor with "What are the constitutive principles at issue?" The concept and its groundrules are fixed by "questioner's prerogative." The question being ours, it is *our* conception of "morality" and its governing paradigms that is conclusive for our deliberations. At this stage absolutism prevails.

The reality of it is that a certain fixity and invariability functions in the moral realm through the fact that there is a uniformity of principles at the level of fundamentals or basics. Consider such rules as

—Recognize rational agents as persons having interests that deserve recognition in our deliberations.
—Treat people as ends and not as means subservient of your own wants and desires.
—Do not inflict needless pain on others.
—Do not deceive people maliciously.

Such principles are morally non-negotiable. A person who dismisses them or a society whose operational code omits them—let alone replaces them by incompatibly variant principles—does

not have an *alternative* morality on the issue, but no morality at all. Such agents simply have no idea what morality is all about. A society may—very possibly—do without morality altogether, but it cannot have a *different* morality. For in respect to fundamentals there is no plurality of moralities. There is just morality, period. And if a society did not play by those fundamental rules that define it, then it no more has *morality* than it would have *chess* if it played by different rules.

The overarching "fundamental principles" of morality—for example, that morality is a matter of respect for persons and care for their interests—are inherent in the very concepts that are at issue. If you abandon principles of that sort, then you are simply not involved with the *moral* enterprise at all. And this is so for *conceptual* reasons. The basic rules of knifehood or evidence or morality are "culture dependent" only in the sense that some cultures may conceivably not pursue that particular project (the cutting-with-knives enterprise, the evidentiary enterprise, the moral enterprise) at all. But it is just not feasible that others could pursue *the same* enterprise in a radically different sort of way—that they have learned how to have knives without blades, evidentiation without grounds, or moral agency without those fundamental principles that define what morality is all about. And the absoluteness of morality is not a matter

of cultural imperialism but of conceptual fixity. In either case, moral agency or archery, we are dealing with a certain *kind* of thing—one that is fixed as such by the very words used to place the topic at issue on the agenda of consideration.

3. The "Anthropologists' Fallacy"

The confusion between morality and mores is endemic in the social science community, whose members standardly depict morality as a matter of the behavioral practices of a society. The sociologist Émile Durkheim, for example, asserted in a series of influential studies that morality is nothing other than the science of mores (la science des moeurs).[72] And this typifies the position of traditional ethnographers. W. G. Sumner maintained in his widely disseminated book *Folkways* that the facts of ethnography prove "that 'immoral' never means anything but 'contrary to the mores of the time and place'."[73] "Morality," Ruth Benedict insists, "differs in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits."[74] Social scientists of every stripe urge on us the equations:

morally blameworthy (wrong) = contrary to (local) custom
morally meritorious (right) = in accordance with (local) custom

But here, as elsewhere, error does not become truth through its pervasiveness.

Ruth Benedict speaks for anthropologists without number in treating the customs of different cultures as representing "the coexisting and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence."[75] Yet to see slavery, torture, cannibalism, human sacrifice, etc. as social practices "equally valid" with wearing turbans or drinking afternoon tea is patent folly. Moral appropriateness is not a matter of custom. Whatever "validity" may be at issue here clearly has nothing to do with moral validity. The violation of a moral rule, unlike that of a mere custom, is by its very nature something grave and serious. For in violating a moral rule, you do not just break with an established pattern. With a moral rule, the well-being and real interests of people are deeply engaged and their human right and responsibilities profoundly involved.

For in their endeavors to study the morality of other cultures and civilizations, anthropologists do not probe deeply enough. For what is at issue with morality (as distinguished from mere *mores*) is not simply a study of behavior patterns and not even of the relevant overtly formulated *rules* of behavior—the behavioral injunctions and prohibitions of the group. With morality, the essential thing is the *justificatory rationale* that underlies those

behavioral patterns and rules. The salient issue is: "How is obedience to the rules argued for? What sorts of considerations are adduced to support the claim that the rules should be obeyed?" Only if this validation takes the form that the rules ought to be obeyed because this is required for serving the true interests and authentic rights of people at large is morality at issue. (To reemphasize: it is the matter of *good reasons* for acting that is crucial to morality.) The crux of morality is not the descriptive issue of how people in fact generally do behave (which is the most that cross-cultural comparison *can* reveal), but the normative issue of how people ought to behave with a view to the entitlements and interests of their fellows. What counts for morality is not the *practices* (or the rules of conduct that consolidate them), but the *principles* that set out the reasons through which practices are justified. The pivotal factor is not the *rules* but the *values* at work. Where morality is concerned, the quest for behavioral invariants or universals—however interesting in its own right—is simply beside the point.

If morality were no more than a matter of "appropriate behavior"—regardless of the sorts of *standards* of appropriateness at issue—then the variety of behavioral customs would indeed fragment morality into a disjointed chaos. We would then have to follow anthropologists to distant

corners of the globe to catalogue countless strange practices—outlandish and bizarre customs of all sorts that have little if any bearing on human virtue or well-being. But the variety of behaviors approved or indeed mandated in different human communities has little to do with *morality* as such, anthropologists by the legion to the contrary notwithstanding.

No doubt at the level of causal explanation people or societies hold certain moral views because they are accustomed or conditioned (or otherwise causally induced) to do so. And it is entirely conceivable that custom-based habituation is the operative causal mechanism here. But to equate *causal explanation* with *rational validation* is about as serious a philosophical error as it is possible to make—a violation of fundamental distinctions. People may well hold certain moral (or mathematical) views as a matter of custom, but the appropriateness or legitimacy of those beliefs nowise depends on the customs of the community. Morality is not about "socially approved habits" as such, but about *the sorts of reasons* for which certain modes of behavior are approved—to wit, those which relate to protecting people's interests.

William Graham Sumner's dictum that "the mores can make anything right"[76] is egregiously incorrect—mores can make anything commonplace (or accepted or expected), but they can

make wrongs into rights no more than a linguistic change can make cats into dogs. Morality is crucially concerned *for the rights and interests of others*, and this is *not* something that depends on the vagaries of communal custom. For morality does not hinge on local practices or rules, but on the underlying universal norms and values that these practices or rules are—or should be—designed to implement. And this is so because morality is a functional project whose mission is to coordinate the action of a society's members into modalities optionally conducive to meeting human needs of their members at large.

A relativism stands committed to the idea that morality is simply a matter of local convention and thereby loses sight of what is really at issue with morality—the proper heed of people's real interests. And thereby it makes a travesty of morality by restricting the idea of what people ought to do to what the customs of their society require. It confuses morality with mores. Mores indeed are simply matters of custom and convention, like table manners and dress codes. But morality involves the adaptation to local conditions of universal principles regarding the safeguarding of people's interests. A crucial divide thus separates morality from mores; a difference in kind is at issue. After all, moral choice is a matter of opting not for what is preferred but for what is (morally)

preferable—or can reasonably be claimed to be so. And this *normative* dimension means that the variability involved in the variation of moral rules is a mere surface phenomenon that does not—cannot—reach the level of fundamentals.

To be sure, anthropologists, and even, alas, philosophers, often say things like "The Wazonga tribe deem it morally proper (or even mandatory) to sacrifice first born female children to the tribal gods." But there are big problems here. This way of talking betokens lamentably loose thinking. For compare:

(i) The Wazonga habitually (customarily) sacrifice....
(ii) The Wazonga think it acceptable (or perhaps even meritorious) to sacrifice. . . .
(iii) The Wazonga think it morally acceptable to sacrifice. ...

Now however true and incontestable the first two contentions may be, the third is untenable. For compare (iii) with:

(iv) The Wazonga think it mathematically true that dogs have tails.

No matter how firmly convinced the Wazonga may be that dogs have tails, thesis (iv) taken as it stands is firmly and squarely a thesis of *ours*, and NOT of *theirs*! Accordingly, it is in deep difficulty

unless the (highly implausible) condition is realized that the Wazonga have an essentially correct conception of what mathematics is and, moreover, are convinced that the claim that dogs have tails belongs among the appropriate contentions of this particular realm. Analogously, one cannot appropriately maintain (iii) unless one is prepared to claim both that the Wazonga have an essentially correct conception of what morality is (correct, that is, by *our* lights), and furthermore that they are convinced that the practice in question is acceptable within the framework of this (moral) project as so conceived. And this concatenation is not only implausible in the circumstances, but even paradoxical, seeing that the first commitment powerfully counterindicates the second. The salient point is that the mere fact of seeing this practice as custom-mandated (as part of "what's expected of us and what we've always done") does *not* make it part of their *morality*. Only a morally relevant *rationale* can render a practice a moral one.

The long and short of it is that the anthropological reduction of morality to mores just does not work. Some things are wrong in an absolute and universal way:

—murder (i.e., unjustifiedly killing another person)
—taking improper advantage of people
—inflicting pointless harm

—lying and deception for selfish advantage, betraying a trust for personal gain
—breaking promises out of sheer perversity
—misusing the institutions of one's society for one's own purposes.

Local custom to the contrary notwithstanding, such things are morally wrong anytime, anywhere, and for anyone. Their prohibitions are moral universals—parts of morality as such. (And so they hold good not just for us humans but for all rational beings.)

It is, of course, a fact of life that different societies operate with different moral groundrules at the procedural level. Some societies deem it outrageous for women to expose their faces, their breasts, their knees; others view this as altogether acceptable and perhaps even mandatory. But behind this variation stands a universal principle: "Do not wantonly violate the established rules of proper modesty but respect people's sensibilities about proper appearance." This overarching rule is universal and absolute. Its implementation with respect to, say, elbows or bellybuttons is of course something that varies with custom and the practices of the community. The rule itself is abstract and schematic—in need of implementing criteria as to what "proper modesty and due decorum" demand. The matter is one of a universal principle with variable implementations subject to "locally established

standards and criteria" that are grounded in the customs of the community.

And so, while the concrete strictures of morality—its specific ordinances and procedural rules of thumb—will of course differ from age to age and culture to culture, nevertheless the ultimate principles that define the project of "morality" as such are universal. The uniform governing conception of "what morality is" suffices to establish and standardize those ultimate principles that govern the moral enterprise as such. At the level of fundamentals the variability of moral codes is underpinned by an absolute uniformity of moral principles and values. To depart from this is not a matter of moral innovation but simply a change of subject. What a transvaluation of moral values would give us is not a novel morality but no morality at all.

The ground of the absoluteness of those "fundamental" moral principles thus does not, however, lie in any putative superiority of *our own* moral comportment over that of other cultures and civilizations—any more than the absoluteness of the fundamental principles of archery do. The salient point is a conceptual one. To operate with guns or catapults is not to do archery in a variant and unaccustomed way but is simply not to do archery at all. We have changed the topic. And similarly with those different modes of appraising human action,

when we are dealing with a society that deems it appropriate to abuse women, maltreat strangers, and rejoice in the sufferings of the innocent, we are not dealing with people whose mores are so disconnected from moral concerns that in effect they have a variant sort of morality, but rather with people who have no morality at all as this term is understood.

And it is perfectly possible in theory for a community to have no *moral* norms at all. Its behavioral rules might all be simply totemic ("that's how the gods want us to do things and we must please them") or customary ("that's how our people have always done things, and it is fitting and proper to walk in the ways of our forefathers"). Morality would then simply be absent. For as we have stressed, it is about reasons, and in such situations piety, custom, and habit simply short-circuit reason. But of course such a society is extremely fragile—and therefore vulnerable. When circumstances and conditions change, such authority-based responses lack the flexibility for readjustment— exactly as with instinct-programmed plants and animals. Intelligence is now out of the picture, unable to accomplish its useful work of enhancing the prospects of survival under changing conditions. Accordingly, a totemic/customary society lacks flexibility for adaptation to changing circumstances. Its very survival is at risk,

for if no sensible rationale underlies the rules, there is nothing to fall back on when they fail to prove serviceable.

What we have here is a common sensism in ethics that is markedly different from that of the Scottish philosophers. Those moral contentions that Thomas Reid saw as self-evident moral principles—that benevolent action is a moral desideratum or that we should judge others by the same moral standards that we would have them apply to us—are not dictates of conscience as a mental faculty but rather inherent features of the conception at work when it is morality with its inherent gearing to what is for the best interests of the community as a whole that is on the agenda of consideration. It is the truisms inherent in the very concepts at issue with morality that ground the project in a way that precludes a relativistic pluralism at the level of fundamentals. This aspect of the matter deserves closer examination.

4. Implementation Hierarchies

Morality is a well-defined project whose cohesive unity as such resides in its functional objective of molding the behavior of people through a care for others' rights and interests. All the same, there is *some* room for variation. Even as there are many

ways to build houses, fuel automobiles, or skin cats, so there are various ways of being moral.

However, those different "moralities" are simply diverse implementations of uniform moral *principles*.

All modes of morality have important elements in common simply in view of the fact that *morality* is at issue. Since (by hypothesis) they all qualify as being "modes of morality," they are bound to encompass such fundamental principles as the following:

1. What people do matters. Some actions are right, others wrong, some acceptable and some not. There is an important difference here.
2. This is not just a matter of convention, custom, and the done thing. Violations of moral principles are offenses, not just against sensibility, but against people's just claims in matters where people's actual well-being is at stake.
3. In violating the moral rules we inflict outright injury on the life, welfare, or otherwise legitimate interests of others.

Injunctions of this sort are *by definition* essential to any system of "morality," and they provide the basis for imperatives like:

—Do not simply ignore other people's rights and claims in your own deliberations!
—Do not inflict needless pain on people!

—Honor the legitimate interests of others!
—Do not take what rightfully belongs to others without their appropriately secured consent!
—Do not wantonly break promises!
—Do not cause someone anguish simply for your own amusement!

Principles and rules of this sort are universal and absolute. They are of the very essence of morality; in abandoning them we would withdraw from a discussion of morality and would, in effect, be changing the subject.

From the moral point of view, the *empirical* search for "cultural invariants" as pursued by some ethnicologists is thus wholly beside the point. When such investigations embark on a cross-cultural quest for "moral universals" or "universal values" amidst the variation of social customs, they are engaged in a search that, however interesting in its own way, has nothing to do with the sort of normative universality at issue with morality as such.[77] Moral universality is not a matter of cross-cultural commonality but of a uniformity that is *conceptually* constrained by the nature of morality as such.

But how can this fixity of the basic principles of morality— inherent in the monolithic uniformity of the issue of "what *morality* is"—be reconciled with the plain fact of a pluralistic diversity of (presumably cogent) answers to the question: "What

is it moral to do?" How can such an absolutism of morality's fundamentals coexist with the patent relativity of moral evaluations across different times and cultures?

The answer lies in the fact that several intermediate levels or strata inevitably separate those overarching "basic principles of morality" from any concrete judgments about what it is moral to do. We have, in fact, to deal with a descending hierarchy of characterizing aims, fundamental principles and values, governing rules, implementing directives, and (finally) particular rulings. (See Display 1.)

Display 1

The Stratification Levels of the Implementation Hierarchy for Moral Norms

Level 1	**Characterizing Aims**	"Due care for the best interests of others"
Level 2	**Basic Principles and Values**	"honesty"
Level 3	**Governing Rules**	"Do not lie"
Level 4	**Operating Directives** *(Groundrules of Procedures)*	"Say plainly what you believe (to be so)"
Level 5	**Particular Rulings**	"Answer Jones truthfully (as best you can)"

At the topmost level we have the defining aims of morality, the objectives that identify the moral enterprise as such by determining its nature and specifying the aims and objectives that characterize what morality is all about. (Example: "Act with a view to safeguarding the valid interests of others.") These characterizing aims of morality represent the overarching "defining objectives" of the entire enterprise that characterize the project as such. They explicate what is at issue when it is with *morality* (rather than basket weaving) that we propose to concern ourselves. In spelling out the fundamental idea of what morality is all about, these top-level norms provide the ultimate yardsticks of moral deliberation. And they are unalterably fixed—inherent in the very nature of the subject.

And these fundamental "aims of the enterprise" also fix the basic principles and controlling values that delineate the moral virtues (honesty, trustworthiness, civility, probity, and the rest). Such values define the salient norms that link the abstract characterizing aims to an operating morality of specific rules. The specifications embodied in these basic principles and values are "universal" and "absolute," serving to make up morality as the thing it is. (Examples: "Do not violate the duly established rights and claims of others." "Do not unjustly deprive others of life, liberty, or opportunity for

self-development" "Do not tell self-serving falsehoods." "Do not deliberately aid and abet others in wrongdoing.") These high level principles also lie fixedly in the very nature of the subject. At these topmost levels, then, there is simply no room for any "disagreement about morality." If one does not recognize the fundamental aims, principles, and values that characterize the moral enterprise as such, then one is simply talking about something else altogether. In any discussion of *morality* these things are simply *givens*. But this situation changes as we take further steps in the descent to concreteness.

At the next (third) level we encounter the general rules and regulations that govern the specifically moral transaction of affairs. Here we have the generalities of the usual and accustomed sort: "Do not lie," "Do not cheat," "Do not steal," etc. At this level we come to the imperatives that guide our deliberations and decisions. Like the Ten Commandments, they set out the controlling do's and don'ts of the moral practice of a community, providing us with general guidance in moral conduct. They implement morality's ruling principles at the level of recommended practices in a way that admits of variation in the changeable circumstances of local conditions.

However, a moral rule on the order of

Do not steal = Do not take something that properly belongs to another.

is in itself still something abstract and schematic. It still requires the concrete fleshing out of substantive implementing specifications to tell us what sorts of things make for "proper ownership." And so the next (fourth) level presents us with the groundrules of procedure or implementing directives that furnish our working guidelines and criteria for the moral resolution of various types of cases. (Example: "Killing is wrong except in cases of self defense or under legal mandate as in war or executions.") At this level of implementing standards and criteria, the variability of local practice comes to the fore, so that there is further room for pluralistic diversification here: we ourselves implement "Do not lie, avoid telling falsehoods:" by way of "Say what you believe (to be the case)," but a society of convinced sceptics could not do so. The operating groundrules of Level 4 thus incorporate the situation-relative standards and criteria through which the more abstract, higher level rules get their grip on concrete situations. Those general rules themselves are too abstract—too loose or general to be applicable without further directions to give them a purchase on concrete situations. They must be given concrete implementation with reference to local and variable arrangements.[78]

Finally, at the lowest (fifth) level we came to the particular moral rulings, individual resolutions with respect to the specific issues arising in concrete cases. (Example: "It was wicked of Lady Macbeth to incite her husband to kill the king.")

In such an "implementation hierarchy" we thus descend from what is abstractly and fixedly universal to what is concrete and variable. Level 2 is contained in Level 1 simply by way of exfoliative "explication." But as we move downwards via Level 3 to the implementing specifications of Level 4, there is—increasingly—a looseness or "slack" that makes room for the specific and variable ways of different groups for implementing the particular higher-level objective at issue. (Further examples are given in Display 2.)

Overall, then, we have to deal with a chain of subordination linkages that connect a concrete moral judgment—a particular moral-act recommendation or command—with the ultimate defining aim of the moral enterprise. The long and short of it is that any appropriate moral injunction must derive its validity through being an appropriate instantiation or concretization of an overarching principle of universal (unrestricted) validity under which it is subsumed. It must, in short, represent a circumstantially appropriate implementation of the fixities of absolute morality that inhere in the very nature of what "morality" is all about.

Display 2

Illustrations from the Implementation Hierarchy of Morality

Level 1: Characterizing Aims
- Support the interests of people.

—Avoid injury to the interests of people
—Act to advance the interests of people

Level 2: Basic Principles (Controlling Values)
- Do not cause people needless pain (GENTLENESS)
- Do not endanger people's lives or their well being unnecessarily (CARE FOR SAFETY)
- Honor your genuine commitments to people; in dealing with people give them their just due (PROBITY)
- Help others when you reasonably can (GENEROSITY)
- Don't take improper advantage of others (FAIRNESS)

Level 3: Operating Rules
- Don't hurt people
- Don't lie; tell the truth
- Don't cheat

Level 4: Operating Directives
- Use anesthetics when operating on people
- Be candid when asked questions
- Play with fair dice

Level 5: Concrete Rulings
- Return the money you borrowed from Smith
- Don't pollute this river, dispose of your sewage elsewhere
- Don't let these children play with those matches

To be sure, this sort of story holds not just for morality, but for any goal-oriented human project—medicine or dietetics or nutrition science or whatever. In every case, such a hierarchical series descends from the overarching defining objective of the enterprise at issue down to the specific resolutions of concrete cases. The same structure of practical reasoning by subordination under higher-level norms obtains throughout.

The situation of medicine provides a helpful illustration. Here too there is an "implementation hierarchy" that leads from a fixed "top level" characterizing aim, health, through governing norms and values (like "well-nourished" "well rested" "mentally balanced") to particular rules ("Eat and drink adequately!" "Get enough rest," etc.). Finally, we move via moderating injunctions ("Three meals a day") down to the particular decisions and rulings of medical practice (particular diet-plans or prescriptions). The top levels of such a normative hierarchy are "ultimate"—they define and specify what is at issue in the venture under consideration. But variation arises at the lower levels of implementation. As one moves through the lower levels of such a hierarchy, there is a "slack" that leaves room for increasing variability and dissensus. Specific rules and guidelines will vary with situations and circumstances. We cannot expect to encounter any universal consensus across cultural

and temporal divides—physicians of different eras are (like moralists) bound to differ—and to some extent those of different cultures as well. There is—inevitably—substantial variability among particular groups, each with its own varying ideas conditioned by locally prevailing conditions and circumstances. But the impact of low-level variation is mitigated by the fact that justification at lower levels proceeds throughout with reference to superordinated standards in a way that makes for higher-level uniformity.

The crucial fact is that one selfsame moral value—fairness, for example—can come into operation very differently in different contexts. In an economy of abundance it may militate for equality of shares, in an economy of scarcity for equality of opportunity. The particular circumstances that characterize a context of operation may importantly condition the way in which a moral value or principle can (appropriately) be applied. Uniform high-level principles will have to be implemented differently in different circumstances. Medicine and morality alike are complex projects unified and integrated amidst the welter of changing conditions and circumstances by the determinative predominance of high-level principles.

At the level of basic principles, then, morality is absolute: its strictures at this level hold good

for everyone, for all rational agents. And lower level rules and rulings must—if valid— preserve a "linkage of subsumption" to those highest-level abstractions, a linkage mediated by way of more restrictive principles of implementation. These implementing conditions involve contextual relativity-coordination with contingently variable (setting-dependent and era- and culture-variable) circumstances and situations. Thus while moral objectives and basic principles—those top levels of the hierarchy of moral norms—are absolute and universal, "slack" arises as we move further down the ladder, leaving room for (quite appropriate) variability and differentiation. But a linkage of subordination is maintained throughout.

"Do not unjustifiably take the property of another for your own use" is an unquestionably valid principle of absolute morality. But it avails nothing until such time as there are means for determining what is "the property of another" and what constitutes "unjustified taking!" "Don't break promises merely for your own convenience" is a universal moral rule, and as such is global and absolute. But what sorts of practices constitute making a valid promise is something that is largely determined through localized social conventions. Local context—variable history, tradition, expectation-defining legal systems, and the like—thus

makes for substantial variability at the level of operational rules and codes, of moral practices.

All the same, the validity of concrete rulings is always a matter of their attuning global (and abstract) prescriptions to local (and concrete) conditions. Without that linkage to the fixed highest-level absolutes, the linkage to morality is severed. For a particular ruling to be a proper moral ruling at all, there must be a suitable moral rationale for the action—a pathway of subordination linkages that connects it in a continuous manner all the way up to the characterizing aims of the moral enterprise. Varying practices and codes of procedure only possess moral validity insofar as they are implementations of a fixed and determinate set of moral principles. Moral validity must always root in a moral universality that is constrained by a conceptual fixity on the basis of fundamental principles.

But morality's characteristic universality is inevitably mediated through factors that are variable, conventional, and culturally relative. The rules of hospitality towards strangers, for example, do and cannot but differ drastically in European and in Bedouin culture. Still, the deeper moral principles that underlie the moral rules and practices of a society ("Even strangers have their due—they too are entitled to respect, to courtesy, and to assistance in need") transcend the customs

of any particular community. The local moralities of various communities merely canalize and implement such general principles in a way that attunes them to the character of local conditions and circumstances. As concerns morality, culture is indeed a localizing and differentiating agent—but one that merely conditions to local circumstances those fundamental invariants that are inherent in the very conception of morality as such. For the universality of fundamental moral principles does not mean that all moral agents must proceed in exactly the same way at the level of concrete detail. (Medical competence too is also based on uniform and universal principles— conscientious care to provide the best available treatment for one's patients. But that does not mean that competent doctors must in all times, places, and circumstances administer the same treatments.)

Discussions of moral relativism by philosophers and social scientists alike are all too frequently vitiated by the oversimplification of seeing moral norms at all levels as being of a piece. They fail to distinguish between lower level rules and standards, which indeed are variable and context-dependent, and higher level values and principles, which are fixed, universal, and unchanging. Recognition of the hierarchical stratification of moral norms is essential to a proper understanding of morality. The fact that there are uniform and unchanging

principles at the top of the hierarchy—principles that inhere in the very conception of morality itself—is quite compatible with plurality, variation, and even some measure of conventionality in the moral norms of the lower levels. The multilevel structure of moral norms provides the key to reconciling the inherent absolutism of morality with the "cultural relativity" of moral codes by showing how the relativistic variation of such codes is perfectly compatible with the absolutism of moral fundamentals. Plurality and variability in regard to lower-level norms is nowise at odds with an absolutistic uniformity of higher-level principles.

An absolutistic one-morality doctrine at the level of the basic (abstract or "general") principles of morality is thus perfectly compatible with a circumstantially diversified plurality of moral codes at the level of concrete rules of operation. Morality has two sides. One is a parochial matter of particular practices—of locally conditioned concrete rules of operation relating to locally established claims, entitlements, obligations, and the like. The other is a universal matter of underlying principles that revolve about the governing factor of safeguarding people's real interests. Both are formative aspects of the over-all enterprise. If one forgets about those overarching uniformities, the moral landscape assumes a kaleidoscopic variety.

But appearances are misleading. There is a single overarching framework of *moral* principles that inhere in the very notion of what morality is all about. And so the transcultural variation of moral rules does not show that morality is something merely conventional and customary in nature. It illustrates rather than destroys the many-sided bearing of the uniform, context-transcendent, universal moral principles operative at the level of fundamentals in a way that bars the road to relativism.

And so, despite the variability of mores, nevertheless, at the level of moral fundamentals—of those highest level principles that define the very purport and notion of the moral enterprise—the common-sense view of the matter inherent in the communal understanding of what morality as such is all about is destined to play the determinative uniformizing role. Clearly, when other things are anything like equal, no reasonable person prefers chaos to order in human affairs. No one in their right mind would welcome a *bellum omnium contra omnes* to collaboration in the common interest of a community dependent on collaborative endeavors in meeting the human needs of all concerned. And it is just here that we have the pivot on which the commonsensical aspect of morality turns.

5. Common Sense in Moral Matters

At the level of moral fundamentals, a common-sense approach predicated on universal accessibility of principles once more comes to play a decisive rule. For those uniform moral fundamentals are a matter of commonsensical truisims—elemental considerations inherent in the very concepts at issue. After all, if people are to have a morality at all, they must have a ready access to the fundamentals involved. The object of a moral code is to canalize the everyday interactions of people into generally beneficial lines. By nature such a code is designed for everyday use by everybody. As such it is—and has to be—the sort of thing that anybody can (and presumably will) learn at mother's knee. And this is practicable because even though their application to complex circumstances can be difficult and problematic, those fundamental principles that define the moral project are and must be for the most part trite and obvious. Anything that requires extensive knowledge or deep cogitation is *ipso facto* ruled out as a moral precept or principle.[79] The very idea of moral expertise at the level of fundamental precepts and principles is for this reason totally unrealistic. The basic injunctions of morality then will by their very nature amount to matters of common sense. There can be nothing inherently difficult about them because someone

who does not learn the basics of morality as a child does not learn this at all.

On this basis, of course, those commonsensical dicta that specify the fundamentals of morality and define the moral project as such are by themselves no more all-sufficient for determining a comprehensive code of morality than the cognitive truisms of commonsensical knowledge claims are by themselves sufficient to delineate the fabric of knowledge. In the moral context too, common sense as here understood encompasses only the truistic fundamentals, so that there remains a great deal of deliberative fleshing out to be done. But this, of course, is no real problem. No sensible person would claim that common sense is all there is to it, be it in moral or in cognitive matters. But the fact remains that the basic core of morality is—at the level of its principles—simply a matter of common sense.[80]

This page intentionally left blank

VII

Common Sense in Philosophy

1. No Philosophy Derives from Common Sense

Philosophy seeks to answer our fundamental questions about the world and our place within it in the light of the best-available systematization of our knowledge. And of course common sense is a prominent constituent of this cognitive manifold of ours and must accordingly have some bearing on philosophical issues. However, to speak of common-sense philosophy is almost a contradiction in terms. For the sorts of questions that philosophy asks are just about never the sorts of questions for which common sense has the answer. For the prominence of common sense is pretty generally limited to plain matters of fact about everyday things and affairs. And the facts of common sense are too elementary, too naive to settle philosophical questions. Philosophy and common sense are thus distinct rather than competitive enterprises. How, then, do they relate to each other?

Philosophers often take a dim view of common sense. Thus Immuanuel Kant, for one,

was contemptuous of the claims of common sense, remarking that "seen clearly, it is but an appeal to the opinion of the multitude, of whose opinion the [true] philosopher is ashamed, while the popular charlatan glories and prides in it."[81] And even Thomas Reid agreed with this, though he insisted on giving it a certain anti-philosophical twist:

> From [common-sense] propositions such as these:—*I exist; I am the same person today that I was yesterday; the material [i.e., physical] world exists independent of my mind; the [actual] laws of nature will continue, in future, to operate uniformly as in time past*—no [substantive philosophical] inference can be deduced.[82]

Such truisms, as he saw it, have no philosophical implications: they are too crude, too pre-philosophical for that. The pretensions of philosophy are so substantial that such trivia are beneath its notice. Common sense does not establish philosophical doctrines—no substantive answers to philosophical questions can be inferred from its elemental and elementary facts. As Reid's countryman J. F. Ferrier put it later on:

> Suppose we are discussing the subject of salt, and that we say "Salt is white and gritty, it is in some degree moist, it is sometimes put into a salt cellar and placed

> on the dinner table. . . " . . . No man would be considered much of a chemist, who was merely acquainted with these and other such circumstances, concerning salt. . . . So, in philosophy, no man can be called a philosopher who [in line with common sense] merely knows and says, that he and other people exist, that there is an external world, that a man is the same today as he was yesterday, and so forth. These are undoubtedly truths, but I maintain that they are not truths in philosophy any more than those just mentioned are truths in chemistry.[83]

All this is true enough. But while those basic facts of common sense are not truths *in* philosophy, they certainly are truths *for* philosophy: truths with which philosophy must come to terms. A "common-sense philosophy" is not one that uses common sense as a substitute for philosophizing in answering philosophical questions but rather is merely one that conducts its philosophical business in a way that accepts and acknowledges the cogency of the facts of common sense.

The work of Thomas Reid and the philosophers of the Scottish school he typifies illustrates this in an especially vivid way. These thinkers reasoned as follows: Suppose that a conflict arises between some speculative fact of philosophical theorizing

and certain more particular, down-to-earth bits of everyday common sense. Then it of course will and must be those philosophical contentions that must give way.

In this spirit Reid insisted that common sense must hold priority over the more speculative teaching of philosophy. Maintaining that most philosophers themselves have some sense of this, he observes wryly that "it is pleasant to observe the fruitless pains which Bishop Berkeley took to show that his system . . . did not contradict the sentiment of the vulgar, but only those of the philosophers."[84] Reid firmly held that any clash between philosophy and common sense must be resolved in the latter's favor. Should such a clash occur:

> The philosopher himself must yield . . . [because] such [common-sense] principles are older, and of more authority, than philosophy; she rests upon them as her basis, not they upon her. If she could overturn them she would become buried in their ruins, but all the engines of philosophical subtlety are too weak for this purpose.[85]

In any conflict between philosophy and everyday common-sense beliefs, it is the latter that must prevail. The down-to-earth lessons of ordinary

experience must always prevail over any conflicting speculations of philosophical theorizing. On this point the Scottish common-sensists were emphatic: When conflicts arise, commonplace experience trumps philosophical speculation. And in fact most metaphilosophical accounts of philosophizing agree with this specificity-favoring point of view.

And so common sense is not a rival to philosophy, but a resource that brings grist to philosophy's mill. The definitive task of philosophy is, after all, to make sense of the world's facts as we know them, and common sense is part and parcel of this knowledge. A philosophy will not gain much credit in agreeing with common sense, but it runs the risk of very substantial discredit for going against it. Like it or not, scientific theorizing must accommodate observation, and similarly any sensible philosophy must, like it or not, accommodate itself to common sense.

And so, while the dicta of common sense are not philosophy, they do nevertheless impose limiting restrictions on viable philosophizing. After all, a philosopher has to come to terms with the facts. (Recall Thomas Carlyle's classic comment on being informed that somebody had said that she had at last come to accept reality: "By G-d, she'd better!") A philosophical position that runs afoul of the facts—be they scientific or commonsensi-

cal—does so to its own detriment, since it is, for that very reason, a clear and distinct sign of the inadequacy of that position.

By their very nature as such, common-sense truths are of course "obvious." And it is, in general, a sound principle of rational procedure not to belabor the obvious. However, it is one thing to belabor the obvious and something rather different to ignore it. Among present-day philosophers, saying of a contention that "it is no more than common sense" is apparently to take a stance of derogation rather than praise. The complainer seems to think that the proper answer to a question in this domain has to be something recondite, abstruse, and unexpected. But this is a very questionable view. In philosophy certainly one need not make a great fuss about common-sense truths, but one cannot leave them out of account.

Often philosophical problems arise out of *aporiai*: clusters of individually plausible but collectively incompatible propositions. Pure logic here furnishes only the obvious fact *that* something must be made to give—that one of these incompatible propositions must be abandoned or amended. But which one is to bear the burden of readjustment cannot be determined by logic itself. Here common sense is often not merely helpful but actually provides our only guide.[86]

2. Respecting Common Sense

As Thomas Reid rightly insisted, the theses and teachings of a sensible and cogent philosophy must be consonant with common sense. Two requirements are principally at issue here:

(1) Terms for ordinary things must be used conformably to their ordinary usage. The opinions of people-in-general regarding what words mean and how they are used must be honored. It is usage and not theory that determines meanings. (For example, if a philosopher is to talk about *knowledge*—and not simply "change the subject"—it will have to be knowledge as people ordinarily talk about it that is at issue.)

(2) Unless there are cogent (and adequately explained counter-reasons for doing so, whatever is maintained must be consonant with people's common-sense knowledge. If a common-sense proposition is to be set aside or contradicted, a telling case must be built up for doing so. (As we have seen, presumption is always powerfully on the side of common sense.)

The first of these requirements is simply a matter of rational dialectic and pivots on what might be termed Questioner's Prerogative—the principle that in endeavoring to answer a question we must address the very question being asked and therefore proceed within the conceptual frame of reference in which the question is posed. When the ideas

at issue in ordinary terms and statements are in question, their meanings must be honored in their philosophical elucidation. To depart from this precept is once again to "change the topic"—to address issues other than those on the agenda of consideration.

This second principle means that any philosophical doctrine that is at odds with common sense is for this very reason enmeshed in difficulty. For when *A* conflicts with *B* we have to ask ourselves about their comparative reliability. And anything that contravenes common sense in those matters that belong to its actual province is thereby made questionable. As A. Lalande put it:

> The propositions generally accepted as fact among our contemporaries are propositions that every philosopher who wants to express and communicate his thought is necessarily obliged to take as a point of departure.[87]

It is certainly conceivable that in the interests of achieving a smooth systematization, some parts of common sense may be called into question. But that such challenges will succeed is not very likely. The structure of the relevant presumptions is such that it would take a very great deal indeed to dislodge any of the facts of common sense. After all, in case of conflict the weaker must give

way to the stronger. With conflicts we always face the question: which is the more plausible, to have the theory give way to common sense or to have common sense give way to the theory? And here as Reid and his congeners rightly insisted, *good* sense will almost automatically be on the side of *common* sense.

This view of the matter bears a close kinship to that of C. S. Peirce, who referred to his own approach to philosophy as one of "critical common-sensism." The rulings of common sense should—as he saw it—be respected by philosophy, albeit not with slavish dedication, seeing that philosophy's concerns extend far beyond the decidedly limited range with respect to which the structures of common sense enjoy probative authority.

3. Philosophy Must Come to Terms with Common Sense and Accommodate It

A sensible common-sense approach to philosophizing is not a skepticism that rejects philosophy through its replacement by the trivial commonplaces of everyday life—as was urged by those sceptics of classical antiquity who sought to be *adoxastos* in rejecting flat-out all philosophical doctrine and speculations. It is, instead, an approach to philosophizing that insists upon respecting and accommodating the products of common sense

without claiming that once this is done there is no further work to do. For, of course, common sense does not constitute a philosophy—any more than logic or mathematics or physics does. Addressing philosophical questions is not the work of common sense—any more than it is the work of logic or mathematics or physics. But of course all of these bodies of information have an indirectly formative bearing on philosophy in that any philosophical thesis or doctrine that runs afoul of the truths established in these descriptions would by this very fact manifest its inadequacy and intolerability. To deny that apples can grow on trees would be just as fatal to the thinkability of a philosophical theory as to deny that two plus two makes four.

It is not just a merit but virtually a necessity that on these commonplace issues for which common-sense judgments are appropriate, a philosophical position would agree with them. For a philosophical position to contradict common sense in *these* matters would be an effectively fatal flaw. If ever a philosophical thesis, theory, or doctrine did indeed come into clash or conflict with common sense, then we would have little plausible choice but to dismiss it out of hand. While the dicta of common sense do not constrain any particular philosophical thesis or position, they do nevertheless serve to constrict the range of potentially viable

philosophical doctrines. They do this not in the way of affirmative establishment but in the way of negative elimination. Accordingly, a common approach to philosophizing calls for respecting the data of common sense—to accept them as appropriate insofar as this is compatible with the overall commitments of responsible inquiry.

Since common-sense claims are unexciting truisms, what is of philosophical interest here are not issues *of* common sense per se, but issues *about* common sense. And the crucial point here is that the theses of common-sense philosophy represent contentions *about* common sense, but of course will not (or need not) themselves be obvious and evident but rather merely concern themselves with contentions that are obvious and evident. They need not be what they discuss, any more than statements about poetical assertions need themselves be poetical, or statements about funny jokes need be funny. The propositions of philosophizing *about* these obvious common-sense propositions can themselves be subtle and sophisticated.

The fact is that philosophy's proper preoccupation is less with the substance of common sense than with its rationale. The question "What does common sense tell us about this or that matter?" is not a philosophical question as such. But there are also various higher-level issues that revolve around

common sense itself, in specific such questions as:

> When, where, how far, and why do the dicta of common sense deserve credence, respect, and implementation?

This sort of higher-level question cannot itself be resolved on the basis of mere common sense but calls for deliberation at a deeper level. And it is questions of this sort that by nature and by right afford topics of philosophical deliberation. The banal commonplaces of common sense do not constitute a philosophy. They do not resolve any substantive philosophical issues. But they certainly do afford materials of philosophical reflecting since deliberation about their philosophical role and their epistemic place in the larger scheme of things is potentially of significant philosophical interest.

4. Falling Afoul of Common Sense

To be sure, some philosophers seem to think that common sense can be used to make considerable philosophical hay. Thus G. E. Moore—for example[88]—reasons as follows:

(1) "This is an inkstand" is a truth—and indeed even a "childishly simple" one.
(2) An inkstand (as every knows) is a material object.

(3) *Therefore:* Material objects exist. [From (1) and (2).]
(4) Radical idealism denies the existence of material objects.
(5) *Therefore*: radical idealism is wrong [since it conflicts with—and indeed denies—thesis (3)].

But of course such position-elimination—even if successful—does not qualify as a philosophical doctrine. Even as not-green is not a color, so the rejection of a philosophical position scarcely constitutes one itself. And then too there looms the question of whether the radical idealism at issue in (4) has ever actually been propounded in such a way as to deny the existence of commonplace objects. After all, no one in their senses has ever denied the existence of material objects in the manner of inkstands. The idealist—Bishop Berkeley for example—does not want to gainsay common-sense artifacts. For him, rather, the conception of "material objects" is seen as a technical philosophical term of art, and it is the reality of objects *in that particular sense of the term* that he is concerned to deny. As Thomas Reid remarked, "it is pleasant to observe the fruitless pains which Bishop Berkeley took to show that his system . . . does not contradict the sentiment of the vulgar, but only those of the [materialist] philosopher."[89]

The impact of common sense upon philosophical issues is further instanced by such doctrinal positions as:

- *Solipsism*: the ontological doctrine that no one save oneself exists—that other people are simply a figment of one's own mental projection: there are no "others."
- *Radical Phenomenalism*: the epistemological doctrine that only the subjective facts of how things appear to us are ever known and that all objective facts lie beyond our cognitive reach: there is no knowledge of operative fact.
- *Crude Materialism*: the ontological doctrine that physical objects and processes are all that exists and authentic reality is confined to the realm of matter and its doings, with all else being a matter of illusion or delusion: there is no existence apart from the material.

All such radical negativisms are blocked by the simple realities affirmed by common sense—at any rate in their simplest and crudest construction. But the salient point throughout such exclusions is that common sense does not legislate philosophical doctrines: it only exercises a veto power. No positive substantive solution to a philosophical problem is produced by the minimalia of common sense and the *via negativa* of common-sense philosophizing.[90]

5. Philosophy vs. Common Sense

Still, does common sense not sometimes lose its battles with philosophical reflection? Not as readily as it might seem.

"Who can doubt," asked Thomas Reid, "that every change that happens in nature must have a cause?" Yet is not this ontological "Principle of Causality" in big trouble nowadays? Does not chance and choice so figure in modern physics—quantum physics above all—in a way that renders this common-sense principle untenable? Not really. For the realm of nature that is historically at issue in that principle is the macroworld of our everyday experience—the world of elevators and automobiles, of forest fires and rainstorms! And at this level the Principle of Causality is secure enough for all our purposes—practical and theoretical alike. The breakdown of causality at the microlevel is something that happens below the radar screen of our commonsensical concerns.

Again, the philosophical phenomenalist—if at all sensible in articulating the position—will not say "There just are no commonplace objects (such as, e.g., stones) but only bundles of sensations." He will not quarrel with the correctness of common-sense contentions but rather only with their explanatory basis.

The reality of it is that a sensible and generous construal of the substantive doctrine that serious philosophers seriously maintain is seldom, if ever, in contradiction with the teachings of common sense. The idea that philosophers are generally—or indeed even commonly—engaged in an enterprise that outrages common sense by rejecting the terminability of its commonplaces is an extremely dubious proposition. For the fact is that philosophy and common sense do not in general offer answers to the same questions but addresses altogether different issues. G. E. Moore's insistence on the commonsensical fact that "this is a human hand" no more demolishes philosophical worries about "the reality of the external world" than Dr. Johnson demolished philosophical idealism by kicking a stone. The philosopher is not worried about the experience of hands and stones but about what such experience portends. And his theories do not unravel the validity of common sense facts but rather raise some issues—be they proper or misguided—about their significance in the larger scheme of things.

The philosopher who claims to "knows better" than ordinary people is—or generally purports to be—dealing as an expert with a technically construed domain of phenomena where expertise is possible. The concepts and ideas with which he works are accordingly virtually bound to relate to

artifacts of creative intelligence—which, as such, differ from the commonplace materials of everyday life and common discourse. And for that reason his deliberations are likely to be discontinuous with the questions and concerns at issue in the commonplace conceptions and ideas of everyday life.

The fact is that even a *philosophy* of common sense will have to be something that transcends the range and reach of common sense itself. For a philosophical study of common sense—such as that at issue within these pages themselves—can arrogate to itself none of the epistemic merits that it is proper to ascribe to our common-sense beliefs. Common-sense philosophizing may well speak for common sense, but common sense is unable to return the compliment.

6. Common Sense Brings Grist to Philosophy's Mill

However, while the truisms of common sense will not of themselves provide us with answers to philosophical questions, the fact nevertheless remains that they can furnish material of indispensable utility in the development of philosophical arguments. Consider, for example, the following piece of philosophical reasoning.

(1) We humans think of ourselves as rational agents.
(2) Rational agents can and should think of themselves as possessed of free will.
(3) Rational beings possessed of free will can and should think of themselves as morally responsible for their actions.

∴ We humans can and should think of ourselves as morally responsible for our actions.

To be sure, this reasoning rests on several substantive philosophical premisses (viz. (2) and (3)). However it also indispensably involves (1), which is merely a common sense truism.

And this is significant in the present context. For it illustrates that, while common sense truisms do not of themselves constitute philosophical theses, they can so function in a larger context as to prove indispensably useful in the substantiation of philosophical theses or doctrines. Accordingly, they can and do play an indispensably useful role within the larger *fabric of reasons* by which philosophical theses and doctrines can be rationally substantiated.

After all, the truths of common sense constitute a prominent resource among the *data* of *philosophy*—the facts with which our philosophizing must come to terms. Consider the situation of a moral philosopher endeavoring to assess the acceptability of the thesis: "One can only be mor-

ally responsible for outcomes one could possibly have prevented." To show the untenability of this contention, a philosopher might well offer the following counterexample:

> Consider the case of four collaborating conspirators each of whom manages to insert one-third of a fatal does of a poison into the dinner of their victim: one into the appetizer, one into the main dish, one into a side dish, and one into dessert. Clearly each co-conspirator is morally responsible for the victim's murder. Yet in the circumstances, none could have prevented the outcome—the withdrawal of any one would still have left a fatal dose of poison to do its work. (Various side-conditions are here left unmentioned—for example that the circumstances are such that no co-conspirator could have forewarned the victim.)

Observe that it is crucial for this reasoning that such facts are at our disposal as "Three thirds of something (e.g., a dose of poison) constitutes one whole," or again that "Causal involvement is required for moral responsibility." Both of these contentions could plausibly be represented as common sense truths, and clearly this philosophical argument cannot be developed without them. In themselves they are not philosophical theses but facts about numbers and about the meanings of

terms such as "moral responsibility." But nevertheless they are indispensable parts of the overall "fabric of reasons" that constitute the rationale on which that philosophical contention rests. (Within this fabric, however, it is the theoretical and thus non-common-sense contention that "contributing co-conspirators bear moral responsibility for the result of their collaboration," that does the bulk of the philosophical work.)

7. Throwing Common Sense to the Winds: The Shipwreck of Wild Conjecture in Philosophy

And so, not only does common sense provide a topic for philosophizing, but it has an important bearing on philosophical methodology. This becomes clear through the following line of consideration.

The traditional philosophers' quest for generality and precision has led them time and again to drive our concepts against the scalpel's edge of hypothetical cases that require sharp-edged and clearly articulated resolutions to bring their contentual anatomy to view.[91] This methodological recourse to puzzle-cases is readily illustrated by the example of those hyper-extravagant hypotheses that give a kind of science-fiction aspect to much recent philosophizing with its proliferation of emotional robots, personality exchanges, and the like.

The contemporary literature of the philosophy of mind is full of robots whose communicative behavior is remarkably anthropoidal (are they "conscious" or not?) and of personality exchanges between people (which one is "the same person?"). But all such proceedings are intrinsically defective. The assumptions at issue call for the suppositional severing of what normally goes together—and do so in circumstances where the concepts we use are predicated upon a certain background of "normality." No supposedly clarificatory hypothesis should arbitrarily cut asunder what the basic facts of this world have joined together—at any rate not where elucidating those concepts whose life-blood is drawn from the source of fact is concerned. If we abrogate or abolish this factual framework by projecting some contrary-to-fact supposition—however well-intended to clarify the issues—we thereby destroy the undergirding basis that is essential to the applicability and viability of these concepts.

Consider one classical example: John Stuart Mill's critique of any theory of substance that contemplates a non-sensible *substrate* of sensation is an example. Mill wrote:

> If there be such a substratum, then suppose it is at this instant miraculously annihilated, and let the sensations continue in

> the same order. How would the *substratum* be missed? By what signs should we be able to observe that its existence had been terminated? Should we not have as much reason to believe that it still existed as we now have? And if we should not then be warranted in believing it, how can we be so now?[92]

But note that Mill's thought experiment turns on our supposing that *it [the substratum] is . . . annihilated and . . . [the] sensations continue [unchanged and] in the same order*. And this supposition is, on the face of it, absurd. If the non-sensible substrate of sensation indeed is what it is by hypothesis supposed to be in its very nature—namely, that which accounts for the substance and the ordering of our sensations—then the hypothesis we are being invited to make is simply self-contradictory: it makes no sense to suppose the phenomenon in the absence of that which by hypothesis produces it. (It would be like imagining the *sun*light in the absence of the sun.) If—as is indeed the case—our standard view of the world is *de facto* a causal one, so that our sensations are taken to have non-sensuous causes, then the prospect of discussing this non-sensuous causal basis without thereby annihilating its sensuous results is simply absurd—much like supposing that the oxygen and hydrogen be annihilated while leaving the water intact.

And so, in philosophy, as in life, our experientially based common-sense conceptions are inherently geared to the world's contingent structure, made into viably integrated units only by the factual arrangements of the world in which they have evolved. These concepts represent internally diversified *combinations* of logically separable elements that are held together by the glue of a substantive view of the empirical facts. Every philosophically significant conception has an inner complexity in which theoretically separable factors are conjoined in coordinated juxtaposition. But their integrity as viable conceptual units rests on a factual rather than theoretical basis: they hinge upon an empirically based, fact-laden vision of how things work in the world. They lack the abstract integrity of purely theoretical coherence that alone could enable them to accommodate the demands of purely theoretical, fact-abstractive precision. And when the very meaning of a concept presupposes certain facts, its explication and analysis clearly cannot—in the nature of the case—enter into the supposition that this basis is simply abrogated. The clarification of such issues cannot be pressed beyond the cohesive force of the factual considerations that unify the operative concepts and thereby underwrite their applicability.

When philosophical speculation introduces fanciful hypotheses to abrogate fundamental realities as our experience brings them to light, then the foothold for our concepts dissolves, and the relevant sector of our conceptual scheme is abrogated. It would be going a bit too far to say that no useful purpose whatsoever can be realized in this way. (For example, a science-fiction-style hypothesis can effectively bring to light the significant fact *that* certain of our concepts are indeed multicriterial and rest on certain empirical presuppositions.) But what this method certainly cannot manage to do is to serve as a basis for making our *existing* concepts more precise because the supposedly superior idea that results in these circumstances will not—and in the nature of the case cannot—qualify any longer as a version of the concept with which we began.

This fact of an experiential and empirical background for our everyday-life conceptual scheme has far-reaching philosophical ramifications. For, various philosophers see the aim of the discipline in terms of an abstract exploration of theoretical possibilities. Along with Christian Wolff (who defined philosophy as the study of possibility as such), they take the line that natural science deals with the real world, while speculative philosophy deals with the realm of the possible. The present position is not totally at odds with such a view. It does, however, require one to heed the distinction

of *realistic* possibilities that do not abrogate our understanding of the normal course of things and that keep their speculative flights within the limits of the plausible, from *fanciful* possibilities that kick over the traces of our understanding of the ways in which the world works. When we subject our normality-geared conceptions to the impact of suppositions of the latter sort, we jump into a vortex of conceptual chaos where, quite literally, we are utterly at a loss for what to say. Genuine conceptual innovation now becomes necessary, and there is no way of predicting its outcome. To the question "What would you say if . . .?" we would in such cases have to reply: "We just wouldn't know what to say. . . . We'll just have to cross that bridge when we get there." For when we embark on a radical hypothesis that violates the conditions of normality, then our normalcy-predicated concepts cannot be brought to bear at all. We have no ready answer to the question "What would you say if . . . (if worst came to worst—e.g., if flowers started talking like people)?" Whenever the upheaval created by such an hypothesis is so extensive, we are plunged into cognitive chaos. We are now simply at a loss—we would have to go through the agonizingly innovative process of rebuilding part of our conceptual scheme from the ground up.

In the face of any counterfactual hypothesis, we have to "change the world"—or at any rate, part of our picture of it. For any fact is surrounded by others in such a way as to block it in, so that changing it about requires changing many others as well. As a concrete example, consider the following belief-contravening supposition: "Assume that tigers were canines." Of course, this hypothesis arises in a context in which, patently, we know each of the following:

(1) Tigers are felines.
(2) Tigers are not canines.
(3) No felines are canines.

The assumption explicitly instructs us to drop item (2). But are we to alter the boundaries of the classification "felines" (and so drop (1) as well), or to keep these boundaries the same and so countenance tigers as canines-cum-felines (thus dropping (3))? Obviously we must, in the interests of mere self-consistency, take one or the other of these steps if logical paradox is to be avoided. But of course the assumption by itself affords us no directions for effecting a choice. As this example illustrates, every belief-contravening hypothesis is by nature expansive in that its adoption always requires further adjustments.

To effect the necessary readjustment of beliefs that is necessitated by a contrary-to-fact hypothesis we have only one guide—our grasp on the world's normal course of things. We want to create the least *possible* disturbance in the fabric of envisioned reality. But if the hypothesis at issue is sufficiently wild and far-fetched ("Suppose bees could speak English"), then this guidance is lost to us. If normality is violated too radically, then we just do not have enough to go on in making sense of counterfactual hypotheses. When too much damage is done to the fabric of fact on which our concepts are predicated, then we literally "just don't know what to say."

In the interests of theoretical clarity and generality and precision (that is to say, in the interests of his systematizing concerns), the hypothesis-enchanted philosopher strives for elucidation but will achieve no more than confusion. All those fact-coordinated concepts of ours are predicated upon a certain background of normalcy and standardness, and when this background is abandoned through suppositions misguidedly intended to serve the interest of increasing precision, the result is in fact mere bafflement. For the inner stress among logically divergent factors in our fact-coordinated concepts is (generally) resolved only by the favorable cooperation of empirical circumstance; the tension is unproblematic because the facts (as we

see them) are duly cooperative. But once we tidy up our reliance on these facts in the interests of theoretical neatness, the tension breaks out. The philosopher's "clarifications" by the use of extreme cases and fanciful science-fiction examples engender pressures that burst the bonds that hold our concepts together. When we set the facts aside and tinker with reality by far-fetched hypotheses, the difficulties crowd in upon us. Abrogation of the facts engenders paradox because the concepts at issue are geared to an implicit view of the nature of the real. The tragic destiny of philosophy is to be constrained to pursue the interests of abstract rationality by means of concepts designed to accommodate the facts of ordinary experience; to have to probe the merely possible with tools designed to handle the concretely actual; to be constrained to address the necessary in the language of the contingent.

The lesson of these deliberations is clear. Instead of hankering after theoretical connections that obtain exceptionlessly in any and every conceivable circumstances, however fanciful, the interests of philosophical inquiry are best served by looking to what is normally or standardly true in the world in which we actually live.

In striving for the theoretical tidiness of a generality that liberates us from commitment to contingent facts, philosophers all too often

indulge in hypotheses so far-fetched as to destroy the very concepts being elucidated. Here it is, once again, a standardistic approach geared to the normal condition of things that is needed. For the fact-coordinated concepts we do and must use in philosophy cannot survive in the wake of a suspension of belief that abrogates a commitment to the facts—or purported facts—that constitute the conditions under which alone such concepts are viable and meaningful. Philosophical methodology must respect this circumstance of factual commitment. The introduction of the far-fetched, fact-contravening science-fiction suppositions—that much favored methodological resource among contemporary philosophers—stretches concepts beyond their natural limits by ignoring the ways in which these concepts are fact-coordinated. A concept-apparatus devised for the purposes of the ordinary realm of everyday experience cannot be transplanted without fatal consequences into a realm where the commonsensical principles that characterize this realm have been put into hypothetical suspension.

8. The Indispensability of Common Sense for Philosophy

The point of these observations is not to advocate an unbudging conservatism in the conceptual

domain. There might conceivably be various advantages to be gained by giving up some of our concepts in favor of others. But the hermeneutical gain of elucidation and issue-clarification in philosophical matters that address problems posed in the terminology of everyday-life discourse is not among them. For the fact is that to press our philosophical concepts beyond the limits of the realities that make them viable does not conduce to clarification but leads *ad absurdum*.

Philosophical deliberations ultimately pivot on rough-edged concepts attuned to our practical dealings in a complex world where some degree of oversimplification is always necessary in the interests of manageability.[93] In philosophy, we are constantly constrained to make rough-approximation statements—"promise breaking is morally wrong," for example—indulging in generalizations that eventually need further qualification and amendment because what is literally claimed is not strictly and unexceptionably so (here, in certain cases of incapacity or of conflicts of duty), but will at best represent how matters stand in the normal course of things. And as was argued in Chapter V above, it transpires that only standardism geared to the commonplace reality of the general run of ordinary experience can meet the needs of the situation. And this pushes common sense to the forefront. For, their factual basis in a standardistic

gearing to the ordinary course of things in human experience accordingly has the great advantage of immunizing our philosophical theses and theories against the far-fetched hypotheses and bizarre counter-examples so popular among recent and contemporary philosophers. The philosophical methodology of projecting fanciful "possible worlds" and outlandish science-fiction situations is, in the final analysis, somewhere between problematic and inappropriate. For if we cast common sense to the winds in the course of philosophical analysis, our deliberations become disconnected from those issues and problems whose elucidation is, after all, the very reason for being of the philosophical enterprise.

A particularly important consequence of a commonsensical standardism is that on its basis the entire bizarre demonology of much contemporary philosophy can be averted. We no longer have to worry about cross-wired brains that share the same thoughts (or do they?) or shrewd aliens from outer space that can inspect our visual fields (will they "see the same things" even though their concepts are different?). In particular, once epistemology is viewed in a standardistic light, those various artificial-looking perplexities that befuddle its investigators simply drop off the agenda (or at any rate can be assigned a rather different and subordinate role). The explanatory pursuits of standardist

epistemology downgrade the significance of all those bizarre hypotheses and outlandish thought experiments dear to contemporary epistemologists. This alone is a not insignificant gain.

And so, while common sense is not in a position to resolve philosophical questions, it can and should effectively serve to delimit the range of the sorts of answers that can plausibly be given. And as regards the *method* of philosophizing, it can and should exert a powerfully restraining influence upon the methodology of a recourse to "wild" hypotheses that has become increasingly popular in the last third of the twentieth century.

The lesson of these deliberations, then, is that common sense is a key factor not only for the rational conduct of our everyday-life dealings with matters of knowledge, action, and evaluation, but also plays a significant role in philosophical deliberations. The neglect of common sense is just as reprehensible for the philosophizing theoretician as for the ordinary individual in his everyday affairs. Neither can afford to ignore the prosaic but nevertheless crucial demands of common sense. No genuinely philosophical question is adequately resolved by looking to considerations of common sense alone—philosophical issues are far too ambitious and complex for that. But nevertheless no philosophical question is adequately resolved which does not come to terms with the rulings

of common sense—let alone which contradicts them.[94]

Conclusion

In a culture that, like our own, is entranced by novelty and eccentricity, extolling the virtues of common sense may be a thankless endeavor. But it is the mission of philosophers to "tell it as it is," and the elemental realities of common sense constitute an unavoidable—and actually quite instructive—part of their story.

As this story has been told here, several main conclusions are indicated:

- That various latter-day theorists to the contrary notwithstanding, common sense affords an appropriate and effective route to knowledge—albeit knowledge of a decidedly limited and rudimentary sort.
- That common sense is accordingly in a position to blunt the edge of the radical sort of sceptical negativism to which some philosophers have inclined.
- That scientific knowledge complements and supplements common-sense knowledge rather than abolishing or replacing it.
- That common sense has an important part to play not just in cognitive matters but in normative and in practical contexts as well.
- That while common sense facts are too rudimentary to settle philosophical issues, nevertheless questions *about* common sense can afford instructive material for philosophical deliberation.

- That the pivotal role of common sense for language and communication endows it with a substantial bearing on philosophical method.

Overall it is, or should be, clear that common sense renders a critically important service in human affairs by way of providing indispensable materials that no other resource at our disposal can duplicate.

Many philosophers hold it in contempt not only because it is so easy of access and generally available but also because it is rather trivial in substance. The supply being so ample, its commercial value, so to speak, is low. But like the very air we breathe it is indispensable to our ability to function effectively as the sorts of beings we are.

Above all, it deserves to be stressed that the resource of common sense itself—unlike the trite and uninspiring information that it puts at our disposal—is an item of substantial theoretical interest. For, as the present discussion has sought to show, deliberation regarding common sense can lay claim to much instructive potential from a philosophical point of view. Its current unpopularity among philosophers notwithstanding, common sense fully deserves the attention and respect that were bestowed upon it throughout the earlier history of the subject from classical antiquity onwards.

Notes

[1] See Danielle Lories, *Le sens commun et le jugement du phronimos: Aristote et les stoiciens* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions Peeters, 1998).

[2] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, opening sentences.

[3] See Thomas DeKonnick, "Les multiples acceptations du 'sens commun'," *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, vol. 110 (2003), pp. 707-20.

[4] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming, for A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1751).

[5] James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature of Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (Edinburgh: Publisher, 1770) I, i, p. 45.

[6] For details regarding his work see the Bibliography at the end of the book.

[7] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: J. Bell, 1785) VI xxi 183b; B168-9.

[8] See the Bibliography for details.

[9] Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, tr. John Oxford (London: Dent, 1970), p. 108. Italics supplied.

[10] As André Lalande stresses in his *Vocabulaire de la philosophie*, 9th ed., (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 972) there is an obvious danger of conflating these two senses.

[11] Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (Edinburgh: A. Mullar, 1764) I, iii.

[12] *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Chap. V. Reid would have done well here to speak of "contingent knowledge."

[13] Reid did not make the bracketed qualification, but it helps averting the putative reality of mere spots in one's visual field.

[14] Qui veram habet ideam, simul scit se veram habere ideam, nec de rei veritate potest dubitare; Spinoza, *Ethica*, II, 43.

[15] "Common sense is best seen as a mix of *folk theories* or, if talk of theories is seems too pretentious here, folk opinions. . . . A glance at the print shows that folk theory has no special warrant;" Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 10.

[16] Contra sensum communem peccare dicitur qui si saepe sic peccaret stultus esset; G. W. Leibniz, *Textes inédits*, ed. Gaston Grua (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. 727.

[17] *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* VII (209b; B215-160); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 229.

[18] S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 119.

[19] See, for example, the discussion of the position of William of Ockham (d. 1349) in John Boler, "Instructive and Abstractive Cognition," in Norman Kretzmann et al. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 460-78; see especially pp. 466-68.

[20] See Wolterstorff, *Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, p. 223.

[21] Wolterstoff, *Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, p. 223.

[22] Common sense: *koinê aesthêsis* (Greek), *sensus communis* (Latin) *sens commun* (French), *Gemeinsinn* (German).

[23] Aristotle, *Topics*, 100b21. On views of common sense in classical antiquity see Danielle Lories, *Le Sens commun et de jugement du phronimos: Aristote et les stociens* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions Peeters, 1998).

[24] Medieval scholasticism introduced a different sort of sensus commonis by contrasting the outer senses (sight, touch, hearing, etc.) with an inner sense capable of apprehending matters about which two or more senses can inform us in common, even as the shape of the sugar cube can be revealed, both by sight and by touch. Clearly the apprehension of such commonality is not revealed by any of the outer senses themselves, but requires a different capacity for its apprehension, and thus access to sense-commonalties was characterized as sensus communis. As such it is something quite different from the object of our present concerns.

[25] Alfons Weische, *Cicero und die neue Akademie* (Münster: Westf., Aschendorff, 1961; 2nd ed. 1975).

[26] Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 527.

[27] Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man,* p. 530.

[28] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Preface, A259-60.

[29] See for example Peter Unger, "Toward a Psychology of Common Sense," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 19 (1982), pp. 117-29.

[30] J. Lachelier in André Lalande, *Vocabulaire de la Philosophie*, p. 971.

[31] See especially C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. 5, sect. 5.497-537.

[32] He observed that "it is possible that propositions that really are indubitable for the time being, should nevertheless be false;" C. S. Peirce *Collected Papers*, vol. 56, sect. 5.498.

[33] See Philip de Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 84-86.

[34] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, VI, iiv; *Works* ed. Hamilton, I, pp. 440-41.

[35] Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 35.

[36] Paul Edwards, "Russell's Doubts About Induction," *Mind,* vol. 58 (1949), pp. 141-163 (see p. 144). Note that Edwards does not speak *in propria persona* here.

[37] It must be realized that the "certainty" at issue in these discussions is not the subjective psychological state of a feeling of certainty at issue in locutions like "I feel certain that *p*." Rather it is a matter of the objective epistemic circumstances, and the relevant locutions are of the impersonal character of "It is certain that *p*." This is crucial to the sceptic's case. "And once we have noticed this distinction, we are forced to allow what we are certain of very much less than we should have said otherwise;" H. A. Pritchard, *Knowledge and Perception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 97.

[38] John L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 118-19).

[39] "What I mean is this: that my not having been on the moon is as sure a thing for me as any grounds I

could give for it;" Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), Sect. I II; cf. also Sect. 516.

[40] Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 178-179.

[41] The "problem of knowledge" that figures in much of the epistemological literature is thus a creation of those philosophers who endow our knowledge claims with a hyperbolic absoluteness never envisaged in or countenanced by our ordinary usage of knowledge-terminology. Having initially created difficulties by distorting our usage, philosophers are then at great pains to try to revalidate it. This whole project gives an aura of unrealism to much of epistemological discussion. For an interesting discussion of relevant issues see Oliver A. Johnson, *The Problem of Knowledge* (The Hague: Niejhoff, 1974).

[42] On this issue see J. L. Austin on "Other Minds" (1946), reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 44-84. To be sure, the operation of the distinction between realistic and hyperbolic possibilities of error will to some extent depend upon "the state of 'knowledge' of the day." But this simply carries us back to the truism that what people reasonably accept as known is 'state-of-knowledge' dependent and that the plausibly purported knowledge of one era may turn out to be the error of another.

[43] Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 239.

[44] Further considerations relating to some of this chapter's themes are also discussed in the author's *Scepticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

[45] The epistemology of trust has become a flourishing industry. A helpful entrée into the literature is Gloria Origgi, "Is Trust an Epistemological Notion," *Episteme*, vol. 1 (2004), pp. 66-72.

[46] See, for example, George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: W. Strahan, 1776).

[47] The situation is one of the sort called the prisoner's dilemma by game theorists. For a good account, see Morton D. Davis, *Game Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 92-103. See also A. Rapaport and A. M. Chammah, *Prisoner's Dilemma: A Study in Conflict and Cooperation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965); Anatol Rapaport, "Escape from Paradox," *American Scientist* 217 (1967) 50-56; and Richmond Campbell and Lanning Sowden (eds.), *Paradoxes of Rationality and Cooperation* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

[48] "In dicendo autem vitium vel maximum sit a vulgari genere orationes atque a consuetudine communis sensus abhorrere" (Cicero, *De oratore* I, 3, ad fin).

[49] Compare the discussion of Thomas Reid's position in sect. 2 of Chapter I.

[50] Specifically, Solomon Asch found that in certain situations of interactive estimation, "whereas the judgments were virtually free of error under control conditions, one-third of the minority estimates were distorted toward the majority." See his "Studies of Independence and Conformity: I. A Minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority," *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, vol. 70, no. 9 (1956), pp. 1-70.

[51] Ibid, p. 69.

[52] John Sabini and Maury Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 84-85.

[53] Harry Kalven, Jr., and Hans Zeisel, *The American Jury* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[54] Usefully relevant discussions can be found in David Lewis, *Convention: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). But contrast Angus Ross, "Why Do We Believe What We Are Told?" *Ratio*, vol. 28 (1986), pp. 69-88.

[55] On this role of "conceptual schemes" that coordinate shared concepts and shared beliefs see the author's *Empirical Inquiry* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982).

[56] Some further issues relevant to this chapter's deliberations are discussed in the author's *Cognitive Economy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989) and in *Philosophical Standardism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

[57] See Terence Parsons, "A Prolegomenon to Meinongian Semantics," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 71 (1974), pp. 551-60, and also "A Meinongian Analysis of Fictional Objects," *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, vol. 1 (1974), pp. 73-86.

[58] On this issue see the author's *Cognitive Economy*.

[59] London: Macmillan, 1928, pp. ix-x.

[60] Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, tr. P. P. Wiener (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 164-65.

[61] Duhem, *Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, p. 179. This circumstance did not elude Neils Bohr himself, the father of complementarity theory in physics: "In later years Bohr emphasized the importance of complementarity for matters far removed from

physics. There is a story that Bohr was once asked in German what is the quality that is complementary to truth (*Wahrheit*). After some thought he answered clarity (*Klarheit*);" Stephen Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. 74, footnote 10.

[62] Vagueness constitutes a context in which we trade off informativeness (precision) with probable correctness (security), with science moving toward the former, and everyday knowledge toward the latter. The relevant issues are considered in tantalizing brevity in Charles S. Peirce's short discussion of the logic of vagueness, which he laments as too much neglected, a situation that has since been corrected only partially.

[63] C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. 8, sect. 8.208.

[64] Examples of this sort indicate why philosophers are unwilling to identify *knowledge* with *true belief*, even where justified.

[65] Compare the author's discussion in *Forbidden Knowledge* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), pp. 58-77.

[66] H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 134-40.

[67] Hilary Putnam, "What is Realism," in Jerrett Leplin (ed.) *Scientific Realism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 177-194.

[68] It is its far looser tie to theory that makes experimentation a bulwark of scientific realism. Compare Ian Hacking's *Representing and Intervening* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1983), especially Chapter 16 "Experimentation and Scientific Realism."

[69] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, sect. 60 (Brunschwicg).

[70] The classical exponent of moral absolutism is Immanuel Kant. His relevant books, *Critique of*

Practical Reason, Foundations of the Metaphysic of Morals, Metaphysical Principles of Virtue, and *Lectures on Ethics*, are readily available in numerous editions and translations. Some useful modern discussions are: G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy, *Philosophy*, vol. 33 (1958), pp. 1-19: Jonathan Bennett, "Whatever the Consequences," *Analysis*, vol. 26 (1966), pp. 83-102; P. T. Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969), see esp. Chap. 9; and James Rachels, "On Moral Absolutism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 48 (1970), pp. 338-353.

[71] Observe that if *X* believes of knives (as we understand them) that they are something very different (say the mirrors of small, thin leprechauns) and that as such they have magical powers, then we cannot appropriately say: "*X* believes that knives have magical powers." To approach adequacy, we would have to adopt a far more complex locution, along something like the following lines: "*X* takes knives to be the magic mirrors of small leprechauns and thus to be equipped with mysterious powers."

[72] Compare also Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who holds that moral codes and systems "are mere rationalizations of custom;" *La Morale et la science des moeurs* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1904).

[73] William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn, 1907), sect. 439. See also Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York, 1928), and Edward A. Westermark, *Ethical Relativity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932).

[74] Ruth Benedict, "Anthropology and the Abnormal," *Journal for General Psychology*, vol. 10 (1934), pp. 59-80.

[75] Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), p. 278.

[76] W. G. Sumner, *op. cit.*, sect. 31.

[77] See Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture and Behavior* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1962); *idem*, "Ethical Relativity; Sic et Non," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 52 (1955), pp. 663-677.

[78] The analogy of natural law is helpful: "Theft, murder, adultery and all injuries are forbidden by the laws of nature; but what is to be called theft, what murder, what adultery, what injury in a citizen, this is not to be determined by the natural but by the civil law…' (Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, Chap. IV, sect. 16). St. Thomas Aquinas too held that appropriate human law must be subordinate to the natural law by way of "particular determination," with different human laws varying from place to place, nevertheless representing appropriate concretizations of the same principle of natural law. See *Summa Theologica*, IaIIae, questions 95-96.

[79] On these issues compare the discussion of "moral expertise" on pp. 95-99 in David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Thus another however fails to distinguish between general moral *principles* (which are trite and expertise precluding) and their application in making moral judgments in concrete and often complex circumstances (where expertise is indeed in prospect.)

[80] Some of this chapter's themes are also touched upon in the author's *Moral Absolutes* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

[81] Introduction to the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*.

[82] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man,* Iii 2; *Works*, ed. Hamilton, Vol. III, pp. 45-46.

[83] James Frederik Ferrier, *Scottish Philosophy, Old and New* (Edinburgh and London: Sutherland and Knox, 1856), p. 7.

[84] *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, VI iv, p. 570.

[85] *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* I, v (ed. Hamilton, p. 102b; ed. Brookes, p. 21).

[86] On this issue see also Duhem, *Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, p. 217.

[87] Lalande, *Vocabulaire de la philosophie*, p. 972.

[88] "Some Judgments of a Perception," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n. s., vol. 19 (1918-19), pp. 1-29; reptd. in his *Philosophical Studies* (London: Paul-Trench-Trubner, 1922).

[89] *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* VI iv, p. 570.

[90] The utility of common sense for philosophy, real though it be, can also be exaggerated. Thus C. S. Peirce was carried away in a moment of instrumentalistic overenthusiasms into writing: "The kind of philosophy which interests me and must, I think, interest everybody is that philosophy, which uses the most rational methods it can devise, for finding out the little that can as yet be found out about the universe of mind and matter from those observations which every person can make in every hour of his waking life;" *Collected Papers*, vol. I, sect. 1.126 (ca. 1905).

[91] Thus Bertrand Russell wrote: "A logical or philosophical theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing with puzzles, and it is a wholesome plan . . . to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since these serve much the same purpose as is served by

experiments in physical science;" "On Denoting," *Mind*, vol. 14 (1905), pp. 484-85.

[92] Quoted in William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Pragmatic Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1896), p. 80.

[93] "[Language embodies] the inherited experience and acumen of many generations of men. But then, that acumen has been concentrated primarily upon the practical business of life. If a distinction works well for practical purposes in ordinary life (no mean feat, for even ordinary life is full of hard cases), then there is sure to be something in it, it will not mark nothing; yet this is likely enough not to be the best way of arranging things if our interests are more extensive or intellectual than the ordinary;" J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 133.

[94] The author's *Philosophical Standardism* discusses some issues relevant to the present chapter.

Bibliography

Alston, William P., "Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 2 (1985), pp. 435-452.

Anscombe, G. E. M., "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy*, vol. 33 (1958), pp. 1-19.

Anstey, Peter, "Thomas Reid and the Justification of Induction," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 12 (1995), pp. 77-93.

Aquinas, St. Thomas, *Summa* Thomas Gilby (ed.) (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1969).

Asch, Solomon, "Studies of Independence and Conformity: I. A Minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority," *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, vol. 70, no. 9 (1956), pp. 1-70.

Austin, John L. "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 44-84.

———, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

Barker, S. F. and T. L. Beauchamp (eds.), *Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations* (Philadelphia: University City Science Center, 1976).

Beattie, James, *An Essay on the Nature of Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (Edinburgh: Publisher, 1770).

———, *Elements of Moral Science*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Cadell and Creech, 1790-93; reprinted New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1977).

———, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (Edinburgh, Printed for A. Kincaid & J. Bell, 1770).

Benedict, Ruth, "Anthropology and the Abnormal," *Journal for General Psychology*, vol. 10 (1934), pp. 59-80.

———, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934).

Bennett, Jonathan, "Whatever the Consequences," *Analysis*, vol. 26 (1966), pp. 83-102.

Boas, Franz, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York: Norton, 1928).

Bourdillon, Philip, "Thomas Reid's Account of Sensation as a Natural Principle of Belief," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 27 (1975), pp. 19-36.

Brink, David O., *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Broadie, Alexander, *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990).

Brown, Thomas, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, , 4 vols. (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co. for W. and C. Tait, and Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820).

Campbell, George, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1776).

———, *A Dissertation on Miracles* (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1797).

Campbell, Richmond and Lanning Sowden (eds.), *Paradoxes of Rationality and Cooperation* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

Centore, F. F., "Hume, Reid and Skepticism," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 28 (1981), pp. 221-20.

Chisholm, R. M., *The Foundations of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982).

———, "Keith Lehrer and Thomas Reid," *Philosophical Studies*, (1990), pp. 33-38.

———, *Thesis of Knowledge*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991).

Cicero, *De Oratore*, vol. 1-2, tr. E. W. Sutton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1942).

Dalgarno, Melvin and Eric Matthews (eds.), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989).

Davie, G. E., *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961).

———, *The Scottish Metaphysics: A Century of Enlightenment in Scotland* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Davis, Morton D., *Game Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

De Bary, Philip, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism* (London: Routledge, 2002).

DeKonnick, Thomas, "Les multiples acceptations du 'sens commum'," *Révue philosophique de Louvain*, vol. 110 (2003), pp. 707-20.

Descartes, René, *Discourse on Method; and Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993).

Devitt, Michael, and Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

Duhem, Pierre, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, tr. P. Wiener (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, tr. John Oxford (London: Dent, 1970).

Eddington, Sir Arthur, *The Nature of the Physical World* (London: Macmillan, 1928).

Edwards, Paul, "Russell's Doubts About Induction," *Mind,* vol. 58 (1949), pp. 141-163.

Ellos, W. J., *Thomas Reid's Newtonian Realism* (Washington: University Press of America, 1981).

Engle-Tiercelin, C., "Reid and Peirce on Belief," in M. Dalgarno and E. Matthews (eds.), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1989), pp. 205-224.

Ferrier, James Frederick, *Scottish Philosophy, the Old and the New* (Edinburgh, London: Sutherland and Knox, 1856).

———, *Philosophical Works of James Frederick Ferrier* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1875).

Fine, Arthur, "The Natural Ontological Attitude," in Jarret Lephon (ed.), *Scientific Realism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1984), pp. 83-107

Fodor, Jerry, *Psychosemantics* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1987).

Fraser, A. Campbell, *Thomas Reid* (Edinburgh, London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1898).

Fruchtman, J. Jr., "Common Sense and the Association of Ideas; the Reid-Priestley Controversy," in M. Dalgarno and E. Matthews (eds.), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1989), pp. 421-432.

Gallie, R. D., "Reid, Kant and the Doctrine of the Two Standpoints," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 74 (2000), pp. 409-424.

Geach, P. T., *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969).

Grave, S. A., *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

Grice, H. P., Studies in the Way of Words (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Hacking, Ian, *Representing and Intervening* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Helmer, Olaf and Nicholas Rescher, "On the Epistemology of the Inexact Sciences," *Management Sciences*, vol. 6 (1959), pp. 25-52.

Hobbes, Thomas, *De Cive*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

Holt, D. C., "The Defence of Common Sense in Reid and Moore," in M. Dalgarno and E. Matthews (eds.), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1989), pp. 145-158.

Home, Henry and Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming, for A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1751).

Hope, Vincent (ed.), *Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

Hutcheson, Francis, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises* (London: J. Darby, 1725).

———, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections: With Illustration on the Moral Sense* (Dublin: publisher, 1728).

Jaffe, G., "Thomas Reid," in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (oneline: http:plato.stanford.edu/entries/reid/).

James, William, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Pragmatic Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1896).

Johnson, Oliver A., *The Problem of Knowledge* (The Hague: Niejhoff, 1974).

Kalven, Harry Jr., and Hans Zeisel, *The American Jury* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Mary Gregor (trans.) (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

———, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, James W. Ellington (trans.) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

———, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Mary Gregor (trans.) (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

———, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*,

Kluckhohn, Clyde, "Ethical Relativity; Sic et Non," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 52 (1955), pp. 663-677.

———, *Culture and Behavior* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1962).

Kretzmann, Norman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Lalande André, *Vocabulaire de la philosophie*, 9th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).

Lehrer, Keith, *Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

———, "Stewart's Enrichment of the Common Sense Tradition," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 3 (1986), pp. 45-53.

———, "Conception without Representation, Justification without Inference: Reid's Theory," *Nous*, vol. 23 (1989), pp. 145-154.

———, *Thomas Reid* (London: Routledge, 1989).

Leibniz, G. W., *Textes inédits*, ed. Gaston Grua (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948).

Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *La morale et la science des moeurs* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1904).

Lewis, David, *Convention: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

Lobkowicz, E., *Common Sense und Skeptizismus* (Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986).

Lories, Danielle, *Le sens commun el le jugement du phronimos: Aristotle et les stoiciens* (Louvain-la-Nauve: Editions Peeters, 1998).

Madden, Edward H., "The Metaphysics of Common Sense," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 30 (1983), pp. 23-36.

Mahan, Asa, *A System of Intellectual Philosophy* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1855).

———, *A Critical History of Philosophy* (London: Ellnot Stock, 1881).

Manns, James W., *Reid and his French Disciples: Aesthetics and Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

McCosh, James, *Intuitions of the Mind*, rev. ed. (New York: Carter, 1867).

———, *The Scottish Philosophy, Biographical, Expository, Critical, from Hutcheson to Hamilton* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1875).

———, *First and Fundamental Truths* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1889).

Moore, G. E., "Some Judgments of a Perception," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n. s., vol. 19 (1918-19), pp. 1-29. Reptd. in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Paul-Trench-Trubner, 1922).

———, "A Defence of Common Sense," in J. S. Muirhead (ed.), *Contemporary British Philosophy*, 2nd series (London, Allen & Unwin, 1925). Rptd. in Moore, G. E., *Philosophical Papers* (London: Allan & Unwin, 1959).

Murphy, Arthur E., "Moore's 'Defence of Common Sense," in Paul Schlipp (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1968), pp. 299-317.

Origgi, Gloria, "Is Trust an Epistemological Notion," *Episteme*, vol. 1 (2004), pp. 66-72.

Parsons, Terence, "A Prolegomenon to Meinongian Semantics," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 71 (1974), pp. 551-60.

———, "A Meinongian Analysis of Fictional Objects," *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, vol. 1 (1974), pp. 73-86.

Pappas, G. S., "Common Sense in Berkeley and Reid," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 40 (1986), pp. 292-303.

———, "Sensation and Perception in Reid," *Nous*, vol. 23, (1989), pp. 155-167.

———"Causation and Perception in Reid," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 50, (1990), pp. 763-766.

Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées and Other Writings*, tr. Honor Levi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Peirce, C. S., *Collected Papers,* 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934-58).

Pritchard, H. A., *Knowledge and Perception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).

Putnam, Hilary, "What is Realism," in Jerrett Leplin (ed.), *Scientific Realism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 177-194.

Rachels, James, "On Moral Absolutism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 48 (1970), pp. 338-353.

Rapaport, Anatol, "Escape from Paradox," *American Scientist* vol. 217 (1967), pp. 50-56.

Rapaport, Anatol and A. M. Chammah, *Prisoner's Dilemma: A Study in Conflict and Cooperation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965).

Reid, Thomas, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (Edinburgh: A. Mullar, 1764). Also, ed. T. Duggan (Chicago: University

of Chicago Press, 1970), and, ed. D. R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

———, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: J. Bell, 1785).

———, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (Edinburgh: J. Bell, 1788). Also ed. B. A. Brody (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969).

———, *Philosophical Works*, 8th ed. William Hamilton, rptd. (Hildsheim: Georg Olms, 1967).

———, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, 2 vols., 6th ed. William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1863). Rptd. (Thoemmes Press: Bristol, 1994).

———, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays*, ed. Keith Lehrer and R. E. Beanblossom (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).

Rescher, Nicholas, *Scepticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

———, *Empirical Inquiry* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982).

———, *Forbidden Knowledge* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987).

———, *Cognitive Economy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

———, *Moral Absolutes* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

———, *The Validity of Values* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

———, *Philosophical Standardism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

Ross, Angus, "Why Do We Believe What We Are Told?" *Ratio*, vol. 28 (1986), pp. 69-88.

Rowe, W. L., *Thomas Reid on Freedom and Morality* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Russell, Bertrand, *Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

———, "On Denoting," *Mind*, vol. 14 (1905), pp. 484-85.

Sabini, John and Maury Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 84-85.

Schneewind, J. B., *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

Seth, Andres, *Scottish Philosophy: A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume* (Edinburgh, London: Blackwood, 1899).

Spinoza, Baruch, *Ethics*,

Steward, Dugald, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid* (Edinburgh: William Greech, 1803).

———, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind/Ovals* (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1792), reptd. (Edinburgh: Hamilton, 1854-58).

———, *Collected Works*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 11 vols. (Edinburgh: Constable, 1854-58). 7th ed. (Edinburgh: Maclachan and Stewart, 1874).

———, *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*, ed. and abridged by J. Walker (Boston: Phillips, Samson & Co., 1868).

Stewart, M. A., (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

Sumner, William Graham, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn, 1907).

Thomson, Judith Jarvis, *The Realm of Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Unger, Peter, "Toward a Psychology of Common Sense," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 19 (1982), pp. 117-29.

Wayland, Francis, *Elements of Moral Science*, ed. J. L. Blau (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963).

Weinberg, Stephen, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).

Weische, Alfons, *Cicero und die neue Akademie* (Münster: Westf., Aschendorff, 1961); 2nd ed. (1975).

Westermark, Edward A., *Ethical Relativity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961).

Wolterstorff, Nicholas, "Reid on Common Sense, with Wittgenstein's Assistance," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 74 (2000), pp. 491-517.

———, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Name Index

Alston, William P., 230
Anscombe, G. E. M., 230, 249n70
Anstey, Peter, 230
Aquinas, St. Thomas, 230, 250n78
Arcesilaos, 45
Aristotle, 30, 43, 44, 45, 243n23
Asch, Solomon, 104, 230, 246n50
Austin, John L, 73, 230, 244n38, 245n42, 252n93

Beattie, James, 13, 14, 46, 231, 241n5
Benedict, Ruth, 168, 231, 250n74, 250n75
Bennett, Jonathan, 231, 249n70
Berkeley, George, 199, 209
Boas, Franz, 231, 249n73
Bohr, Neils, 154, 247n60
Boler, John, 242n19
Bourdillon, Philip, 231
Brink, David O., 231, 250n79
Broadie, Alexander, 231
Brown, Thomas, 231

Campbell, George, 232, 246n46
Carlyle, Thomas, 201
Carneades, 45
Centore, F. F., 232
Chammah, A. M., 238, 246n47
Chisholm, R. M., 232
Cicero, 90, 165, 232, 246n48

Davie, George Elder, 232
Davis, Morton D., 232, 246n47
de Bary, Philip, 232, 244n35

DeKonnick, Thomas, 232, 241n3
Descartes, René, 9, 43, 232, 241n2
Devitt, Michael, 233, 242n15
Duhem, Pierre, 77, 132, 133, 233, 245n40, 247n60, 248n61, 251n86
Durkheim, Émile, 168

Eckermann, J. P., 15, 241n9
Eddington, Sir Arthur, 128, 129, 148, 151, 152, 233
Edwards, Paul, 233, 244n36
Einstein, Albert,156
Ellos, W. J., 233
Engle-Tiercelin, C., 233

Ferrier, James Frederick, 198, 233, 251n83
Fine, Arthur, 233
Fodor, Jerry, 233
Fraser, A. Campbell, 233
Fruchtman, J. Jr., 233

Gallie, R. D., 234
Geach, P. T., 249n70
Goethe, J. W. von., 15
Grave, S. A., 234, 242n18
Grice, H. P., 234, 248n66

Hacking, Ian, 248n68
Helmer, Olaf 234
Hobbes, Thomas, 234, 250n78
Holt, D. C., 234
Home, Henry, (Lord Kames), 12, 234, 241n4
Hume, David, 49
Hutcheson, Francis, 234

Jaffe, G., 235
James, William, 235, 252n92
Jefferson, Thomas, 65
Johnson, Oliver A., 235, 245n41

Kahneman, Daniel,147
Kalven, Harry Jr., 235, 247n53
Kant, Immanuel, 12, 49, 197, 235, 243n28, 249n70
Kluckhohn, Clyde, 235, 250n77

Lachelier, Jules, 56, 243n30
Lalande André, 203, 235, 241n10, 243n30, 251n87
Lavoisier, A. L. de,156
Lehrer, Keith, 83, 235, 245n43
Leibniz, G. W., 25, 236, 242n16
Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, 236, 249n72
Lewis, David, 236, 247n54
Lobkowics, E., 236
Lories, Danielle, 236, 241n1, 243n23

Machiavelli, Niciolo, 165
Madden, Edward H., 236
Mahan, Asa, 236
Manns, James W., 236
McCosh, James, 14, 236
Mill, John Stuart, 217
Moore, G,E., 19, 29, 31, 34, 43, 48, 208, 211, 237
Murphy, Arthur E., 237

Newman, J. H., 70
Newton, Isaac, 156
Nicholas of Cusa, 13

Origgi, Gloria, 237, 246n45

Paine, Thomas, 7
Pappas, G. S., 237
Parsons, Terence, 121, 237, 247n57
Pascal, Blaise, 162, 237, 248n69
Peirce, Charles Sanders, 57, 136, 204, 237, 244n31, 244n32, 248n62, 248n63, 251n90
Philo of Larissa, 45, 46
Priestley, Joseph,156
Pritchard, H. A., 238, 244n37
Putnam, Hilary, 238, 248n67

Rachels, James, 238, 249n70
Rapaport, Anatol, 238, 246n47
Reid, Thomas,14, 17, 18, 25, 30, 33, 43, 46, 47, 48, 57, 61, 149, 150, 178, 197, 198, 199, 202, 204, 209, 210, 238, 241n7, 241n11, 242n13, 243n26, 243n27, 244n34, 246n49, 251n82
Rescher, Nicholas, 234, 238
Ross, Angus, 239, 247n54
Rowe, W. L., 239
Russell, Bertrand, 239, 244n35, 252n91
Rutherford, Ernest,154

Sabini, John, 104, 239, 247n52
Schneewind, J. B., 239
Seth, Andres, 239
Shaftesbury A. A. Cooper, 47
Silver, Maury, 104, 239, 247n52
Smith, Adam, 105
Spinoza, Baruch (Benedict), 23, 159, 242n14
Sterelny, Kim, 233, 242n15
Steward, Dugald, 14, 239
Sumner, William Graham, 168, 171, 240, 249n73,

Thomson, Judith Jarvis, 240
Twersky, Amos, 147

Unger, Peter, 240, 243n29

Wayland, Francis, 240
Weinberg, Stephen, 154, 248n60
Weische, Alfons, 243n25
Westermark, Edward A., 240, 249n73
William of Ockham, 242n19
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 240, 244n39
Wolff, Christian, 220
Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 240, 242n17, 242n20, 242n21

Zeisel, Hans, 235, 247n53

The Aquinas Lectures
Published by the Marquette University Press
Milwaukee WI 53201-3141 USA

1. *St. Thomas and the Life of Learning.* John F. McCormick, S.J. (1937) ISBN 0-87462-101-1
2. *St. Thomas and the Gentiles.* Mortimer J. Adler (1938) ISBN 0-87462-102-X
3. *St. Thomas and the Greeks.* Anton C. Pegis (1939) ISBN 0-87462-103-8
4. *The Nature and Functions of Authority.* Yves Simon (1940) ISBN 0-87462-104-6
5. *St. Thomas and Analogy.* Gerald B. Phelan (1941) ISBN 0-87462-105-4
6. *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil.* Jacques Maritain (1942) ISBN 0-87462-106-2
7. *Humanism and Theology.* Werner Jaeger (1943) ISBN 0-87462-107-0
8. *The Nature and Origins of Scientism.* John Wellmuth (1944) ISBN 0-87462-108-9
9. *Cicero in the Courtroom of St. Thomas Aquinas.* E.K. Rand (1945) ISBN 0-87462-109-7
10. *St. Thomas and Epistemology.* Louis-Marie Regis, O.P. (1946) ISBN 0-87462-110-0
11. *St. Thomas and the Greek Moralists.* Vernon J. Bourke (1947) ISBN 0-87462-111-9
12. *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education.* Étienne Gilson (1947) ISBN 0-87462-112-7
13. *The Natural Desire for God.* William R. O'Connor (1948) ISBN 0-87462-113-5

14. *St. Thomas and the World State.* Robert M. Hutchins (1949) ISBN 0-87462-114-3
15. *Method in Metaphysics.* Robert J. Henle, S.J. (1950) ISBN 0-87462-115-1
16. *Wisdom and Love in St. Thomas Aquinas.* Étienne Gilson (1951) ISBN 0-87462-116-X
17. *The Good in Existential Metaphysics.* Elizabeth G. Salmon (1952) ISBN 0-87462-117-8
18. *St. Thomas and the Object of Geometry.* Vincent E. Smith (1953) ISBN 0-87462-118-6
19. *Realism And Nominalism Revisted.* Henry Veatch (1954) ISBN 0-87462-119-4
20. *Imprudence in St. Thomas Aquinas.* Charles J. O'Neil (1955) ISBN 0-87462-120-8
21. *The Truth That Frees.* Gerard Smith, S.J. (1956) ISBN 0-87462-121-6
22. *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics.* Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R. (1957) ISBN 0-87462-122-4
23. *Thomas and the Physics of 1958: A Confrontation.* Henry Margenau (1958) ISBN 0-87462-123-2
24. *Metaphysics and Ideology.* Wm. Oliver Martin (1959) ISBN 0-87462-124-0
25. *Language, Truth and Poetry.* Victor M. Hamm (1960) ISBN 0-87462-125-9
26. *Metaphysics and Historicity.* Emil L. Fackenheim (1961) ISBN 0-87462-126-7
27. *The Lure of Wisdom.* James D. Collins (1962) ISBN 0-87462-127-5
28. *Religion and Art.* Paul Weiss (1963) ISBN 0-87462-128-3

29. *St. Thomas and Philosophy.* Anton C. Pegis (1964) ISBN 0-87462-129-1
30. *The University in Process.* John O. Riedl (1965) ISBN 0-87462-130-5
31. *The Pragmatic Meaning of God.* Robert O. Johann (1966) ISBN 0-87462-131-3
32. *Religion and Empiricism.* John E. Smith (1967) ISBN 0-87462-132-1
33. *The Subject.* Bernard Lonergan, S.J. (1968) ISBN 0-87462-133-X
34. *Beyond Trinity.* Bernard J. Cooke (1969) ISBN 0-87462-134-8
35. *Ideas and Concepts.* Julius R. Weinberg (1970) ISBN 0-87462-135-6
36. *Reason and Faith Revisited.* Francis H. Parker (1971) ISBN 0-87462-136-4
37. *Psyche and Cerebrum.* John N. Findlay (1972) ISBN 0-87462-137-2
38. *The Problem of the Criterion.* Roderick M. Chisholm (1973) ISBN 0-87462-138-0
39. *Man as Infinite Spirit.* James H. Robb (1974) ISBN 0-87462-139-9
40. *Aquinas to Whitehead: Seven Centuries of Metaphysics of Religion.* Charles Hartshorne (1976) ISBN 0-87462-141-0
41. *The Problem of Evil.* Errol E. Harris (1977) ISBN 0-87462-142-9
42. *The Catholic University and the Faith.* Francis C. Wade, S.J. (1978) ISBN 0-87462-143-7
43. *St. Thomas and Historicity.* Armand J. Maurer, C.S.B. (1979) ISBN 0-87462-144-5

44. *Does God Have a Nature?* Alvin Plantinga (1980) ISBN 0-87462-145-3
45. *Rhyme and Reason: St. Thomas and Modes of Discourse.* Ralph Mcinerny (1981) ISBN 0-87462-148-8
46. *The Gift: Creation.* Kenneth L. Schmitz (1982) ISBN 0-87462-149-6
47. *How Philosophy Begins.* Beatrice H. Zedler (1983) ISBN 0-87462-151-8
48. *The Reality of the Historical Past.* Paul Ricoeur (1984) ISBN 0-87462-152-6
49. *Human Ends and Human Actions: An Exploration in St. Thomas' Treatment.* Alan Donagan (1985) ISBN 0-87462-153-4
50. *Imagination and Metaphysics in St. Augustine.* Robert O'Connell, S.J. (1986) ISBN 0-87462-227-1
51. *Expectations of Immortality in Late Antiquity.* Hilary A Armstrong (1987) ISBN 0-87462-154-2
52. *The Self.* Anthony Kenny (1988) ISBN 0-87462-155-0
53. *The Nature of Philosophical Inquiry*. Quentin Lauer, S.J. (1989) ISBN 0-87562-156-9
54. *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues.* Alasdair MacIntyre (1990) ISBN 0-87462-157-7
55. *Descartes among the Scholastics.* Marjorie Greene (1991) ISBN 0-87462-158-5
56. *The Inference That Makes Science.* Ernan McMullin (1992) ISBN 0-87462-159-3
57. *Person and Being.* W. Norris Clarke, S.J. (1993) ISBN 0-87462-160-7

58. *Metaphysics and Culture.* Louis Dupré (1994) ISBN 0-87462-161-5
59. *Mediæval Reactions to the Encounters between Faith and Reason.* John F. Wippel (1995) ISBN 0-87462-162-3
60. *Paradoxes of Time in Saint Augustine.* Roland J. Teske, S.J. (1996) ISBN 0-87462-163-1
61. *Simplicity As Evidence of Truth.* Richard Swinburne (1997) ISBN 0-87462-164-X
62. *Science, Religion and Authority: Lessons from the Galileo Affair.* Richard J. Blackwell. (1998) ISBN 0-87462-165-8
63. *What Sort of Human Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology.* Marilyn McCord Adams. (1999) ISBN 0-87462-166-6
64. *On Inoculating Moral Philosophy against God.* John M. Rist. (2000) ISBN 0-87462-167-4.
65. *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism.* William P. Alston (2001) ISBN 0-87462-168-2.
66. *Eschatological Themes in Medieval Jewish Philosophy.* Arthur Hyman. (2002) ISBN 0-87462-169-0
67. *Old Wine in New Skins.* Jorge J. E. Gracia. (2003) ISBN 0-87462-170-4.
68. *The Metamorphoses of Phenomenological Reduction*. Jacques Taminiaux. (2004) ISBN 0-87462-171-2.
69. *Common Sense: Common Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition.* Nicholas Rescher. (2005) ISBN 0-7462-172-0.

About the Aquinas Lecture Series

The Annual St. Thomas Aquinas Lecture Series began at Marquette University in the spring of 1937. Ideal for classroom use, library additions, or private collections, the Aquinas Lecture Series has received international acceptance by scholars, universities, and libraries. Hardbound in maroon cloth with gold stamped covers. Uniform style and price ($15 each). Some reprints with soft covers. Complete set (69 Titles) (ISBN 0-87462-150-X) receives a 40% discount. New standing orders receive a 30% discount. Regular reprinting keeps all volumes available. Ordering information (purchase orders, checks, and major credit cards accepted):

Marquette University Press
P. O. Box 388
Ashland OH 44805
Order Toll-Free (800) 247-6553
FAX: (419) 281 6883

Editorial Address:
Dr. Andrew Tallon, Director
Marquette University Press
Box 3141
Milwaukee WI 53201-3141
Tel: (414) 288-1564 FAX: (414) 288-7813
email: andrew.tallon@marquette.edu

Marquette University Press is a member of the Association of American University Presses and the Association of Jesuit University Presses

http://www.marquette.edu/mupress/